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NOVELS OF DETECTION FROM
THE MAIGRET® SERIES
OF MYSTERIES



simenon

A MAIGRET TRIO

Maigret's Failure

Maigret in Society

Maigret and the Lazy Burglar

MAIGRET in SOCIETY
MAIGRET ET LES VIEILLARDS
THE 84TH EPISODE OF THE
MAIGRET SAGA
Georges Simenon

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IT was one of those exceptional months of May which one experiences only two or three times in one's life and which have the brilliance, the taste and the scent of childhood memories. Maigret called it a choral May, for it reminded him both of his first communion and of his first springtime in Paris, when everything seemed new and wonderful.

In the street, in the bus, in the office, he would suddenly come to a halt, struck by a distant sound, by a gust of warm air, by the bright splash of colour of a blouse which took him back twenty or thirty years.

The day before, just as they were setting out to have dinner with the Pardons, his wife had asked him, almost blushing as she spoke:

“You don't think I look too silly, at my age, in a floral dress?”

That evening their friends the Pardons had staged an innovation. Instead of inviting them to their flat, they had taken the Maigrets to a little restaurant on the Boulevard de Montparnasse where the four of them had dinner on the terrace.

Maigret and his wife, without saying anything, had exchanged conspiratorial glances, for it was on this terrace that, nearly thirty years before, they had had their first meal together.

“Is there stewed mutton?”

The owners of the restaurant had changed, but there were still stewed mutton on the menu, wobbly lamps on the tables, evergreens in tubs, and Chavignol in carafes.

All four of them were in high spirits. Over coffee, Pardon had taken a magazine with a white cover out of his pocket.

“You know, Maigret, there’s something about you in the *Lancet*.”

The chief-inspector, who knew the famous and austere English medical journal by name, had frowned.

“I mean there’s something about your profession. It’s in an article by a certain Dr. Richard Fox and this is the passage that concerns you:

“ ‘A skilled psychiatrist, using his scientific knowledge and the experience gained in his consulting-room, is in a fairly good position to understand his fellow human beings. But it is possible, especially if he allows himself to be influenced by theories, that he will understand them less perfectly than a good schoolmaster, a novelist or a detective.’ ”

They had talked about this for some time, now jokingly, now more seriously. Then the Maigrets had walked part of the way home through the silent streets.

The chief-inspector could not know that this remark by the London doctor was going to come back to him several times during the following days, or that the memories awakened to him by this perfect month of May would appear to him almost in the guise of a premonition.

The next day too, in the bus taking him towards the Châtelet, he found himself looking at people’s faces with the same curiosity as when he had been a newcomer to the capital.

Climbing the staircase of Police Headquarters as a divisional chief-inspector, and being greeted respectfully on the way, seemed strange to him. Was it so long since the time when, very much over-awed, he had first entered this service whose chiefs still struck him as legendary beings?

He felt at once gay and melancholy. With his window open, he went through his post, and sent for young Lapointe to give him some instructions.

In twenty-five years the Seine had not changed, neither the boats passing by, nor the anglers sitting in the same places as if they had never budged.

Puffing at his pipe, he was doing his housework, as he put it, clearing his desk of the dossiers piling up on it, and dealing with unimportant business, when the telephone rang.

“Can you come and see me for a moment, Maigret?” asked the Director.

The chief-inspector made his way unhurriedly to the Director’s office, where he remained standing by the window.

“I’ve just had a curious phone call from the Quai d’Orsay. Not from the Foreign Minister in person but from his principal private secretary. He asked me to send over there straight away somebody capable of assuming responsibilities. Those are the words he used.

“ ‘An inspector?’ ” I asked.

“ ‘Somebody of a higher rank would be preferable. It’s probably something to do with a crime.’ ”

The two men looked at one another with a hint of malice in their eyes, for neither of them had a high regard for ministries of any sort, least of all a ministry as starchy as the Foreign Office.

“I thought that you would like to go yourself ... ”

“Perhaps it would be best ... ”

The Director picked up a paper from his desk and held it out to Maigret.

“You have to ask for a certain Monsieur Cromières. He is expecting you.”

“Is he the principal private secretary?”

“No. He is the person who is handling the case.”

“Shall I take an inspector along with me?”

“I don’t know anything more about the business than what I have just told you. Those people like being mysterious.”

Maigret finally picked on Janvier to accompany him and the two of them took a taxi. At the Quai d’Orsay they were not directed towards the great staircase but towards a narrow,

unprepossessing staircase at the back of the courtyard, as if they were being shown in by the side-door or the tradesmen's entrance. They wandered along the corridors for quite a while before finding a waiting-room where an usher wearing a chain, unimpressed by the name of Maigret, made him fill in a form.

At last they were shown into a room where an official, very young and dapper, was standing silent and motionless opposite an old woman as impassive as himself. One had the impression that they had been waiting like that for a long time, probably since the telephone call from the Quai d'Orsay to Police Headquarters.

"Chief-Inspector Maigret?"

The latter introduced Janvier, to whom the young man granted only a distant glance.

"Not knowing what the trouble was, I took the precaution of bringing along one of my inspectors ... "

"Take a seat."

Young Cromières was trying hard to look important and there was something very 'Foreign Office' about his condescending manner of speaking.

"If the Quai got in touch straight away with Police Headquarters ... "

He pronounced the word 'Quai' as if he were talking about some sacrosanct institution.

"... it was because, Chief-Inspector, we are faced with a somewhat exceptional situation ... "

While looking at him, Maigret also kept an eye on the old woman, who was apparently deaf in one ear, for she bent forward to hear better, cocking her head to one side and watching the movements of the men's lips.

"Mademoiselle ... "

Cromières consulted a form on his desk.

"Mademoiselle Larrieu is the maidservant, or the housekeeper, of one of the most distinguished of our former

ambassadors, the Comte de Saint-Hilaire, of whom you must have heard ... ”

Maigret remembered having seen the name in the papers, but that struck him as going back a very long time.

“Since he retired about twelve years ago, the Comte de Saint-Hilaire had been living in Paris, in his flat in the Rue Saint-Dominique. This morning Mademoiselle Larrieu came here at half past eight and had to wait some time before being shown into the presence of a responsible official.”

Maigret pictured to himself the deserted offices at half past eight in the morning, and the old woman sitting motionless in the ante-room, her eyes fixed on the door.

“Mademoiselle Larrieu has been in the Comte de Saint-Hilaire’s service for over forty years.”

“Forty-two,” she specified.

“Forty-two years. She accompanied him on his various missions and she looked after his house. During the past twelve years, she was the only person living with the ambassador in the Rue Saint-Dominique flat. It was there, this morning, that after finding the bedroom empty when she took in her master’s breakfast, she discovered him in his study, dead.”

The old woman looked at each of them in turn, with sharp, searching, suspicious eyes.

“From what she says, Saint-Hilaire would appear to have been hit by one or more bullets.”

“She didn’t call the police?”

The fair-haired young man assumed a conceited expression.

“I can understand your surprise. But do not forget that Mademoiselle Larrieu has spent a large part of her life in the diplomatic world. For all that the Comte de Saint-Hilaire was no longer on the active list, she considered that in the Service there are certain rules of discretion ... ”

Maigret winked at Janvier.

“She didn’t think of sending for a doctor either?”

“It seems there can be no doubt about the question of death.”

“Who is over there in the Rue Saint-Dominique now?”

“Nobody. Mademoiselle Larrieu came straight here. To avoid any misunderstanding and waste of time, I am authorized to inform you that the Comte de Saint-Hilaire was not in possession of any state secrets and that you must not look for a political reason for his death. However, extreme prudence is none the less indispensable. When a well-known man is involved in something of this sort, especially if he has been in the Service, the newspapers are only too apt to give enormous prominence to the affair and to put forward the most improbable hypotheses ... ”

The young man stood up.

“If you will be good enough to come with me, we will go over there now.”

“You too?” Maigret asked with an innocent air.

“Oh, have no fear. I have no intention of interfering with your inquiries. If I accompany you, it is simply to make sure that there is nothing there which might cause us any embarrassment.”

The old woman stood up too. All four went downstairs.

“We had better take a taxi. That would be less conspicuous than one of the Quai limousines ... ”

The journey was ludicrously short. The car drew up in front of an imposing late eighteenth-century building outside which there was no crowd, no inquisitive onlookers. Under the archway, once they had gone through the main entrance, it felt suddenly cool, and in what looked more like a drawing-room than a lodge they could see a uniformed concierge as impressive as the usher at the Ministry.

They went up four steps on the left. The lift was standing motionless in a hall of dark marble. The old woman took a key out of her handbag and opened a walnut door.

“This way ... ”

She led them along a corridor to a room which obviously overlooked the courtyard but where the shutters and the curtains were closed. It was Mademoiselle Larrieu who turned on the electric light, and beside a mahogany desk they saw a body lying on the red carpet.

The three men removed their hats in a single movement, while the old servant looked at them with an almost defiant air.

“What did I tell you?” she seemed to be muttering.

Sure enough, there was no need to bend over the body to see that the Comte de Saint-Hilaire was well and truly dead. One bullet had entered by way of the right eye, blowing open the skull, and judging by the tears in the black velvet dressing-gown and by the bloodstains, other bullets had struck the body in several places.

Monsieur Cromières was the first to go up to the desk.

“You see this? It would appear that he was busy correcting proofs ... ”

“He was writing a book?”

“His memoirs. Two volumes have already appeared. But it would be absurd to look for the reason for his death there, because Saint-Hilaire was the most discreet of men and his memoirs were more literary and picturesque than political in character.”

Cromières was talking in flowery language, listening to himself talk, and Maigret began to feel irritated. There they were, the four of them, in a room with the shutters closed, at ten o'clock in the morning, while the sun was shining outside, looking at an old man's disjointed, blood-spattered body.

“I suppose,” muttered the chief-inspector, not without a certain irony, “that in spite of everything this is still a matter for the Public Prosecutor?”

There was a telephone on the desk, but he preferred not to touch it.

“Janvier, go and phone from the lodge. Get the Prosecutor and the local police inspector ... ”

The old woman kept looking at them, one after another, as if it were her job to watch them. Her eyes were hard, with no sympathy, no human warmth in them.

“What are you doing?” asked Maigret, seeing the man from the Quai d’Orsay opening the doors of a bookcase.

“I am just having a look ... ”

He added, with a self-assurance that was unpleasant in a young fellow of his age:

“It is my duty to make quite sure that there aren’t any papers here the divulgation of which would be inopportune ... ”

Was he as young as he looked? To what service did he belong in fact? Without waiting for the chief-inspector’s permission, he examined the contents of the bookcase, opening files and putting them back one after another.

In the meantime, Maigret walked up and down, impatient, out of temper.

Cromières started on the other pieces of furniture, rummaging in the drawers, and the old woman remained standing by the door with her hat on and her bag in her hand.

“Will you take me to his bedroom?”

She went in front of the man from the Quai, while Maigret stayed in the study where Janvier soon joined him.

“Where are they?”

“In the bedroom ... ”

“What are we doing?”

“For the moment, nothing. I’m waiting for the young gentleman to be good enough to leave the place to us.”

It was not just Cromières who irritated the chief-inspector. It was also the way in which the case presented itself, and perhaps, above all else, the unfamiliar atmosphere into which he had suddenly been plunged.

“The local inspector will be here in a minute.”

“You’ve phoned the Criminal Records Office?”

“Moers is on the way with his men.”

“And the Public Prosecutor?”

“I’ve phoned them too.”

The study was roomy and comfortable. Though there was nothing solemn about it, the place had an air of distinction which had struck the chief-inspector as soon as he had come in. Every piece of furniture, every object was beautiful in itself. And the old man on the floor, with his head practically blown off, retained, in this setting, a certain grandeur.

Cromières returned, followed by the old housekeeper.

“I don’t think there is anything more for me to do here. Once again, I recommend prudence and discretion to you. It cannot be a case of suicide, seeing that there is no weapon in the room. We are agreed on that point, I presume? As to whether a theft has been committed, I leave that to you to discover. In any case, it would be regrettable if the Press were to give undue prominence to this affair ... ”

Maigret looked at him in silence.

“I shall ring you up, if you don’t mind, to find out what news you have,” the young man went on. “It is possible that you may need certain information, in which case you can always apply to me.”

“Thank you.”

“In a chest of drawers in the bedroom, you will find a number of letters which will probably surprise you. It is an old story which everybody knows at the Quai d’Orsay and which has nothing to do with this affair.”

He retired regretfully.

“I count on you ... ”

The old woman followed him to shut the door behind him, and returned a little later without either hat or handbag. She

had not come back to put herself at the chief-inspector's disposal, but rather to keep an eye on the two men.

"Do you sleep in the flat?"

When Maigret spoke to her, she was not looking at him, and she did not seem to have heard him. He repeated his question in a louder voice. This time she cocked her head, turning her good ear towards him.

"Yes. I have a little room behind the kitchen."

"There aren't any other servants?"

"Not here, no."

"You do the housework and the cooking here?"

"Yes."

"How old are you?"

"Seventy."

"And the Comte de Saint-Hilaire?"

"Seventy-seven."

"When did you leave him last night?"

"About ten o'clock."

"He was in his study?"

"Yes."

"He wasn't expecting anybody?"

"He didn't say so."

"Did anybody ever come to see him in the evening?"

"His nephew."

"Where does his nephew live?"

"In the Rue Jacob. He is an antique-dealer."

"Is he called Saint-Hilaire too?"

"No, he is the son of Monsieur's sister. His name is Mazon."

“You’ve got that, Janvier? ... This morning, when you found the body ... Because it *was* this morning you found it, wasn’t it?”

“Yes. At eight o’clock.”

“You didn’t think of ringing Monsieur Mazon?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

She did not answer. She had the fixed stare of certain birds and, like certain birds too, she sometimes remained perched on one leg.

“You don’t like him?”

“Who?”

“Monsieur Mazon.”

“That’s none of my business.”

Maigret knew now that with her everything was going to be difficult.

“What is none of your business?”

“Family matters.”

“The nephew didn’t get on with his uncle?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“What did you do, last night, at ten o’clock?”

“I went to bed.”

“When did you get up?”

“At six o’clock, as usual.”

“And you didn’t set foot in this room?”

“There was no reason for me to come in here.”

“Was the door shut?”

“If it had been open, I should have noticed straight away that something had happened.”

“Why?”

“Because the lamps were still alight.”

“As they are now?”

“No. The ceiling light was not on. Just the desk lamp and the standard lamp in that corner.”

“What did you do at six o’clock?”

“First of all I washed.”

“And then?”

“I cleaned my kitchen and I went to buy some croissants.”

“The flat remained empty during that time?”

“Like every morning.”

“And then?”

“I made some coffee, I had my breakfast, and finally I went to the bedroom with the tray.”

“Had the bed been slept in?”

“No.”

“Was the room untidy?”

“No.”

“Last night, when you left him, was the Count wearing this black dressing-gown?”

“Yes, as he always did in the evening when he didn’t go out”

“Did he go out often?”

“He liked the cinema.”

“Did he invite friends here?”

“Scarcely ever. Now and then he used to go out to lunch.”

“Do you know the names of the people he met?”

“That is none of my business.”

There was a ring at the door. It was the local inspector with his secretary. He looked at the study in surprise, then at the old woman, and finally at Maigret, with whom he shook hands.

“How is it that you got here before us? Did she phone you?”

“She didn’t even do that. She went to the Quai d’Orsay. Do you know the victim?”

“It’s the former ambassador, isn’t it? I know him by name and by sight. Every morning he used to go for a stroll round here. Who did that to him?”

“We don’t know anything yet. I’m waiting for the Prosecutor.”

“The police doctor should be here any minute now ... ”

Nobody touched the furniture or anything else in the room. There was a strange feeling of uneasiness and it was a relief to see the doctor arrive. He gave a little whistle as he bent over the body.

“I suppose I can’t turn him over before the photographers get here?”

“No, don’t touch him ... Have you an approximate idea of the time he died?”

“A good while ago ... At first sight, I should say ten hours or so ... It’s queer ... ”

“What’s queer?”

“He seems to have been hit by at least four bullets ... One here, another there ... ”

Going down on his knees, he examined the body more closely.

“I don’t know what the medical expert will think about it. For my part, I wouldn’t be surprised if the first bullet had killed him and in spite of that the murderer had gone on firing. Mind you, that’s just a theory ... ”

In less than five minutes the flat filled up with people. First came the Public Prosecutor represented by the deputy prosecutor Pasquier and by an examining magistrate whom Maigret did not know very well and who was called Urbain de Chézaud.

Doctor Paul's successor, Doctor Tudelle, arrived with them. Almost immediately afterwards the flat was invaded by the experts from the Criminal Records Office and their bulky apparatus.

"Who found the body?"

"The housekeeper."

Maigret pointed to the old woman who, with no visible emotion, was still watching everybody's movements and gestures.

"Have you questioned her?"

"Not yet. I've just exchanged a few words with her."

"Does she know anything?"

"If she does, it won't be easy to make her talk."

He recounted the story of the Foreign Office.

"Has anything been stolen?"

"At first sight, it seems not. I'm waiting for the Criminal Records people to finish their work to make sure."

"Any relatives?"

"A nephew."

"Has he been informed?"

"Not yet. I intend to go myself, while my men are at work, to tell him what has happened. He lives just a few streets away, in the Rue Jacob."

Maigret could have telephoned to the antique-dealer to ask him to come round, but he preferred to meet him in his own setting.

"If you don't need me any more, I'll go over there now. Janvier, you stay here ..."

It was a relief to come out into the daylight, and the patches of sunshine under the trees on the Boulevard Saint-Germain. The air was warm, the women were wearing light-coloured dresses, and a municipal watering-cart was slowly sprinkling one half of the roadway.

He had no difficulty in finding the Rue Jacob antique-shop, one window of which contained nothing but old weapons, mostly swords. He pushed open the door, making a bell ring inside the shop, and three or four minutes went by before a man emerged from the shadows.

Seeing that the uncle was seventy-seven, Maigret could not expect the nephew to be a youngster. He was none the less surprised to find himself face to face with something like an old man.

“What can I do for you?”

He had a long pale face, bushy eyebrows and a practically bald pate, and his baggy clothes made him look thinner than he was.

“You are Monsieur Mazon?”

“Alain Mazon, yes.”

There were more weapons littering the shop, muskets, blunderbusses, and, right at the back, two suits of armour.

“Chief-Inspector Maigret, of the Judicial Police.”

The eyebrows came together. Mazon was trying to understand.

“You are the Comte de Saint-Hilaire’s nephew, aren’t you?”

“He is my uncle, yes. Why?”

“When did you last see him?”

He answered unhesitatingly:

“The day before yesterday.”

“Have you any other relatives?”

“I am married, with children.”

“When you last saw your uncle, did he seem quite normal?”

“Yes, he was even rather gay. Why do you ask?”

“Because he is dead.”

Maigret saw in Mazon’s eyes the same mistrust that the old housekeeper had shown.

“He has had an accident?”

“In a manner of speaking ... ”

“What do you mean?”

“That he was killed last night in his study by several bullets fired from a revolver or an automatic pistol.”

The antique-dealer’s face registered incredulity.

“Did he have any enemies you know of?”

“No ... Certainly not ... ”

If Mazon had merely said no, Maigret would have paid no attention. The ‘certainly not’, which came rather as an afterthought, made him prick up his ears.

“You have no idea who would stand to benefit by your uncle’s death?”

“No ... No idea whatever ... ”

“Was he a rich man?”

“He had a small private fortune ... He lived mainly on his pension ... ”

“He sometimes came here?”

“Sometimes ... ”

“To have lunch or dinner with you?”

Mazon seemed absentminded, and replied briefly, as if he were thinking of something else.

“No ... Usually in the morning, in the course of his walk ... ”

“He dropped in for a chat with you?”

“That’s it. He used to come in and sit down for a moment.”

“Did you go to see him at his flat?”

“Now and then ... ”

“With your family?”

“No ... ”

“Did you say you had some children?”

“Two ... Two girls ... ”

“You live in this building?”

“On the first floor ... One of my daughters, the elder, is in England ... The other, Marcelle, lives with her mother ... ”

“You don’t live with your wife?”

“Not for some years now ... ”

“You are divorced?”

“No ... It’s rather complicated ... Don’t you think we ought to go over to my uncle’s?”

He went to look for his hat in the half-light of the back-shop, hung a notice saying that he was out on the door, locked up, and followed Maigret along the pavement.

“Do you know how it happened?” he asked.

You could tell that he was anxious, worried.

“I know next to nothing.”

“Was anything stolen?”

“I don’t think so. There was no sign of disorder in the flat”

“What does Jaquette say?”

“You are talking about the housekeeper?”

“Yes ... That’s her Christian name ... I don’t know if it’s her real name, but she has always been known as Jaquette ... ”

“You don’t like her?”

“Why do you ask me that?”

“She doesn’t seem to like you.”

“She doesn’t like anybody except my uncle. If it had been left to her to decide, nobody would ever have been allowed into that flat.”

“Do you think she would have been capable of killing him?”

Mazeron looked at him in astonishment.

“Killing him—her?”

The idea obviously struck him as utterly ridiculous. And yet, a moment later, he found himself thinking again.

“No! ... It isn’t possible ... ”

“You hesitated.”

“Because of her jealousy ... ”

“You mean to say that she was in love with him?”

“She hasn’t always been an old woman ... ”

“You think that they were once ... ”

“It’s probable ... I wouldn’t swear to it ... With a man like my uncle, it’s hard to tell ... You’ve seen the photographs of Jaquette when she was young?”

“I haven’t seen anything yet ... ”

“You’ll see ... It’s all very complicated ... Especially happening just now ... ”

What do you mean by that?”

Alain Mazeron looked at Maigret with a certain weariness and sighed:

“I see that you don’t know anything.”

“What ought I to know?”

“I wonder ... It’s a tiresome story. Have you found the letters?”

“I’m just beginning my inquiries.”

“Today is Wednesday, isn’t it?”

Maigret nodded.

“Just the day of the funeral ... ”

“Whose funeral?”

“The Prince de V—’s. You’ll understand when you have read the letters ... ”

They reached the Rue Saint-Dominique just as the Criminal Records car was leaving, and Moers gave a wave of the hand to Maigret.

II



WHAT are you thinking about, Chief?”

Janvier was surprised at the effect produced by this question which he had asked simply to break a rather lengthy silence. It seemed as though the words had not penetrated straight away to Maigret’s brain, that they were just so many sounds which he had to put in order before he could make out what they meant.

The chief-inspector looked at his companion with big vague eyes and an air of embarrassment, as if he had just given away a secret of his.

“About these people,” he murmured.

Clearly he was not talking about those who were lunching all around them in this Rue de Bourgogne restaurant, but about the others, those of whom they had never heard the day before and whose secret lives it was their job to discover today.

Every time he bought a suit, an overcoat or a pair of shoes, Maigret wore them first of all in the evening, to go for a stroll with his wife through the streets of the district or else to go to the cinema.

“I need to get used to them,” he would say to Madame Maigret when she teased him affectionately.

It was the same when he was immersing himself in a new case. Other people did not realize this, on account of his massive silhouette and the calm expression on his face which they took for self-assurance. In fact, he was going through a more or less prolonged period of hesitation, uneasiness, even timidity.

He had to get used to an unfamiliar setting, to a house, to a way of life, to people who had their own particular habits,

their own way of thinking and expressing themselves.

With certain categories of human beings it was relatively easy, for instance with his more or less regular customers or with people like them.

With others he had to start from scratch every time, especially as he distrusted rules and ready-made ideas.

In this new case, he was labouring under an additional handicap. He had made contact, that morning, with a world which was not only very exclusive but which for him, on account of his childhood, was situated on a very special level.

He realized that all the time he had been in the Rue Saint-Dominique he had failed to show his usual confidence; he had behaved awkwardly; his questions had been guarded and clumsy. Had Janvier noticed?

If so, it had certainly not occurred to him that this was the effect of a distant period in Maigret's past, the years spent in the shadow of a château of which his father had been steward and where, for a long time, the Comte and Comtesse de Saint-Fiacre had been, in his eyes, creatures of another species.

For lunch, the two men had picked this restaurant in the Rue de Bourgogne, on account of its terrace, and they had soon noticed that the place was patronized by officials from the nearby ministries, especially from the Premier's department, so it seemed, with a few officers in mufti who belonged to the War Office.

They were not ordinary pen-pushers. All of them had at least the rank of head clerk, and Maigret was astonished to see how young they were. Their self-assurance surprised him too. From the way they talked and behaved, you could tell that they were sure of themselves. Some of them recognizing him and talking about him in low voices, he felt annoyed at their knowing looks and their irony.

Did the people at the Quai des Orfèvres, who were ministry officials too, give the same impression of knowing all the answers?

This was what he had been thinking about when Janvier had roused him from his reverie. About the morning in the Rue Saint-Dominique. About the dead man, that Comte Armand de Saint-Hilaire, an ambassador for so many years, who had just been murdered at the age of seventy-seven. About the strange Jaquette Larrieu and her little staring eyes which penetrated to the very depths of his being while she listened to him, her head cocked to one side, watching every movement of his lips. And finally about the pale and flabby Alain Mazeron, all alone in his Rue Jacob shop, among his swords and his suits of armour, whom Maigret could not manage to class in any known category.

What were the terms used by the English doctor in the article in the *Lancet*? He could not remember. It was something to the effect that a first-class schoolmaster, a novelist and a detective were in a better position than a doctor or a psychiatrist to understand other people.

Why did the detective come last, after the schoolmaster and particularly after the novelist?

That annoyed him slightly. He was in a hurry to feel at home in this new case, as if to give the lie to the author of the article.

They had begun with asparagus and now they had gone on to ray with browned butter sauce. The sky above the street was still as blue as ever and the women passing by were dressed in bright colours.

Before deciding to go and have lunch, Maigret and Janvier had spent an hour and a half in the dead man's flat, which was already more familiar to them.

The body had been taken off to the Morgue, where Doctor Tudelle was engaged in carrying out the post-mortem. The people from the Public Prosecutor and Criminal Records had gone. With a sigh of relief, Maigret had opened curtains and shutters, letting the sunlight into the rooms, where it had given back to the furniture and other objects their normal appearance.

It did not embarrass the chief-inspector to have Jaquette and the nephew following him around, watching his gestures and facial expressions, and now and then he would turn towards them and ask a question.

No doubt they had been surprised to see him coming and going for such a long time, without looking at anything in particular, as if he were inspecting a flat to let.

The study, which had seemed so stuffy that morning in artificial light, fascinated him, and he kept coming back to it with a secret pleasure, for it was one of the most delightful rooms he had ever seen.

It was a high-ceilinged room, lit by a french window opening on to a flight of three steps, beyond which one discovered with some surprise a well-kept lawn and a huge linden-tree standing in a world of stone.

“Who has the use of this garden?” he had asked, looking up at the windows of the other flats.

The reply came from Mazeron.

“My uncle.”

“None of the other tenants?”

“No. The building belonged to him. He was born here. His father, who was still quite rich, occupied the ground floor and the first floor. When he died, my uncle, who had already lost his mother, kept this small flat and the garden for himself.”

This little detail was significant. It was surely a rare thing, in Paris, for a man of seventy-seven to be living in the house where he was born.

“And what happened when he was serving as an ambassador abroad?”

“He closed the flat and opened it up again when he came home on leave. Contrary to what you might suppose, the building brought him in hardly anything. Most of the tenants have been here so long that they pay derisory rents, so that some years, what with repairs and taxes, my uncle was out of pocket.”

There were not many rooms in the flat. The study did service as a drawing-room. Next to it was a dining-room, opposite the kitchen, and overlooking the street there was a bedroom and a bathroom.

“Where do you sleep?” Maigret had asked Jaquette.

She made him repeat his question and he began to think that this was an idiosyncrasy of hers.

“Behind the kitchen.”

There in fact he found a sort of box-room in which an iron bedstead, a wardrobe and a washbasin had been installed. A big ebony crucifix hung over a holy-water basin adorned with a sprig of box.

“Was the Comte de Saint-Hilaire a religious man?”

“He never missed Mass on Sunday, even in Russia.”

What struck him most of all was a subtle harmony, a distinction which Maigret would have been hard put to it to define. The various pieces of furniture were of different styles and no attempt had been made to form an ensemble. Every room was none the less beautiful in itself; each had acquired the same patina, the same personality.

The study was almost entirely lined with bound volumes, while other books in white or yellow covers were arranged on shelves in the corridor.

“Was the window shut when you found the body?”

“It was you who opened it. I didn’t even touch the curtains.”

“And the bedroom window?”

“That was shut too. Monsieur le Comte was sensitive to the cold.”

“Who had the key to the flat?”

“He and I. Nobody else.”

Janvier had questioned the concierge. The little door cut out of the main door stayed open until midnight. The concierge never went to bed before that time; he sometimes went into his

bedroom, behind the lodge, from which he did not necessarily see people coming in and going out.

The day before, he had not noticed anything out of the ordinary. It was a respectable house, he kept repeating insistently. He had been there for thirty years and the police had never had occasion to set foot in the place.

It was too soon to reconstruct what had happened the previous evening or during the night. He had to wait for the medical expert's report, then for the report of Moers and his men.

One thing seemed clear: Saint-Hilaire had not gone to bed. He was wearing dark grey, pin-striped trousers, a lightly starched white shirt and a bow-tie with spots, and, as usual when he stayed at home, he had put on his black velvet dressing-gown.

"Did he often stay up late?"

"It depends what you mean by late."

"What time did he usually go to bed?"

"I was nearly always in bed before he was."

It was infuriating. The most commonplace questions came up against the mistrust of the old servant, who only rarely gave a direct answer.

"You didn't hear him leave his study?"

"Go into my bedroom and you'll see that you can't hear anything there except the lift, which is on the other side of the partition."

"How did he spend his evenings?"

"Reading. Writing. Correcting the proofs of his books."

"Did he go to bed at midnight, say?"

"Perhaps a little earlier, or a little later, depending on the day."

"And when he went to bed, he never called you, he never had need of your services?"

“What for?”

“He might have felt like a hot drink before going to bed, or perhaps ... ”

“He never had a hot drink at night. And if he wanted something to drink, he had his liqueur cabinet.”

What did he drink usually?”

“Claret with his meals. And in the evening, a glass of brandy.”

They had found the glass, empty, on the desk, and the experts from the Criminal Records Office had taken it away to see if there were any fingerprints on it.

If the old man had had a visitor, he did not appear to have offered him a drink, for no other glass had been found in the study.

“Did the Comte de Saint-Hilaire possess any firearms?”

“Some fowling-pieces. They are in the cupboard at the end of the corridor.”

“He was a keen shot?”

“He sometimes did a little shooting when he was invited to a château.”

“He didn’t own a pistol or a revolver?”

Once again she fell silent, and, as before, her pupils narrowed like those of a cat and her gaze became immobile, expressionless.

“Did you hear my question?”

“What did you ask me?”

Maigret repeated his query.

“I think he had a revolver.”

“With a cylinder?”

“What do you mean by a cylinder?”

He tried to explain. No, it wasn’t a gun with a cylinder. It was a flat weapon, bluish in colour with a short barrel.

“Where did he keep this automatic of his?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t seen it for a long time. The last time, it was in the chest of drawers.”

“In his bedroom?”

She showed him the drawer in question, which contained nothing but handkerchiefs, suspenders and braces in various colours. The other drawers were full of neatly folded linen, shirts, pants, handkerchiefs, and, right at the bottom, dress-shirts.

“When did you last see the automatic?”

“Some years ago.”

“How many years ago, roughly?”

“I don’t know. Time goes so quickly ... ”

“You never saw it anywhere except in that chest of drawers?”

“No. Perhaps he had put it in one of the drawers in his desk. I never opened those drawers, and in any case they were always locked.”

“Do you know why?”

“Why do people lock pieces of furniture?”

“He distrusted you?”

“Certainly not.”

“Whom then?”

“Don’t you ever lock anything, you?”

There was a key, sure enough, a highly ornamental bronze key which opened the drawers of the Empire desk. The contents revealed nothing, except that Saint-Hilaire, like everybody else, accumulated useless little objects, some old empty wallets for instance, two or three gold-rimmed amber cigar-holders which had not been used for a long time, a cigar-cutter, some drawing-pins and paper-clips, and pencils in every conceivable colour.

Another drawer contained writing-paper stamped with a coronet, envelopes, visiting-cards, bits of string carefully rolled up, a pot of paste and a penknife with a broken blade.

The copper trellis-work doors of one bookcase were lined with green cloth. Inside there were no books but instead, on every shelf, bundles of letters neatly tied with string, with a label bearing a date attached to each bundle.

“This is what you were talking about earlier?” Maigret asked Alain Mazon.

The nephew nodded.

“You know who wrote these letters?”

He nodded again.

“Was it your uncle who told you about them?”

“I don’t know if he ever mentioned them to me, but everybody knows about them.”

“What do you mean by everybody?”

“In diplomatic circles, in society ... ”

“Have you ever had occasion to read any of these letters?”

“Never.”

“You can leave us and go and cook your lunch,” Maigret said to Jaquette.

“If you think I’m going to eat on a day like this!”

“Leave us all the same. You can certainly find something to do.”

She was obviously reluctant to leave him alone with the nephew. Several times, he had intercepted glances of something like hatred which she had surreptitiously shot at him.

“You understand?”

“I know that it is none of my business, but ... ”

“But what?”

“A person’s letters are sacred ... ”

“Even if they can help in tracking down a murderer?”

“They won’t help you to do anything.”

“I shall probably need you soon. In the meantime ... ”

He glanced at the door and Jaquette reluctantly withdrew. How indignant she would have been if she had been able to see Maigret taking the Comte de Saint-Hilaire’s place behind the desk on which Janvier was arranging the bundles of letters!

“Sit down,” Maigret said to Mazon. “You know whom this correspondence is from?”

“Yes. You will doubtless find that all the letters are signed Isi.”

Who is Isi?”

“Isabelle de V— . My uncle always called her Isi ... ”

“She was his mistress?”

Why did Maigret think that Mazon looked like a sacristan, as if sacristans had a particular type of face? Mazon too, like Jaquette, allowed a certain time to elapse before answering his questions.

“It seems they were never lovers.”

Maigret untied the string round a bundle of yellowed letters dating from 1914, a few days after the outbreak of war.

“How old is the Princess now?”

“Wait a moment while I work it out ... She is five or six years younger than my uncle ... So she is between seventy-one and seventy-two ... ”

“Did she come here often?”

“I have never seen her here. I don’t think she has ever set foot in the place, or if she has it was before.”

“Before what?”

“Before her marriage to the Prince de V— .”

“Listen, Monsieur Mazon. I would like you to tell me this story as clearly as you can ... ”

“Isabelle was the daughter of the Duc de S—.”

It was a curious experience for Maigret, coming across names he had learnt at school in lessons on French history.

“Well?”

“My uncle was twenty-six when he met her, about 1910. To be more precise, he had met her when she was a little girl in the Duke’s château, where he sometimes spent his holidays. After that he had seen nothing of her for a long time, and it was when they met again that they fell in love with one another.”

“Your uncle had already lost his father?”

“Two years before.”

“Was there anything left of the family fortune?”

“Just this house and a little landed property in Sologne.”

“Why didn’t they get married?”

“I don’t know. Possibly because my uncle was just starting his career in the Service and he had been sent to Poland as second or third secretary to the Ambassador.”

“Were they engaged?”

“No.”

Maigret felt a certain embarrassment as he looked through the letters spread out in front of him. Contrary to his expectations, they were not love-letters. The girl who had written them recounted, in quite a lively style, the day-to-day happenings of her own life and the life of Parisian society.

She did not use the familiar *tu* form with her correspondent, whom she called her *great friend*, and she signed the letters: *your faithful Isi*.

“What happened next?”

“Before the war—I’m talking about the war of 1914—in 1912, unless I’m mistaken, Isabelle married the Prince de V—.”

“Was she in love with him?”

“By all accounts, no. People even say that she told him so to his face. All I know about it is from hearing my father and mother talking about it when I was a child.”

“Your mother was the Comte de Saint-Hilaire’s sister?”

“Yes.”

“She didn’t marry into her own class?”

“She married my father, who was a painter who enjoyed a certain vogue at the time. He is almost completely forgotten now, but there is still a canvas of his in the Luxembourg. Later on, in order to earn a living, he became a picture restorer.”

During this part of the morning, Maigret had had the impression that he was having to drag out every scrap of truth almost by force. He could not manage to obtain a clear picture. These people seemed unreal to him, as if they had come out of a 1900 novel.

“If I understand correctly, Armand de Saint-Hilaire didn’t marry Isabelle because he wasn’t rich enough?”

I suppose so. That’s what I was always told and it seems the likeliest explanation.”

“So she married the Prince de V—, whom you say she didn’t love, and she was honest enough to tell him so.”

“It was an arrangement between two great families, between two great names.”

Hadn’t it been the same in the old days with the Saint-Fiacres, and when it had been a question of finding a wife for her son, hadn’t the old Countess turned to her Bishop for help?

“Did the couple have any children?”

“One child, a boy, after they had been married several years.”

What became of him?”

“Prince Philippe must be forty-five now. He married a Mademoiselle de Marchangy and lives nearly all the year round in his château at Genestoux, near Caen, where he owns a stud and several farms. He has five or six children.”

“For something like fifty years, to judge by this correspondence, Isabelle and your uncle went on writing to each other. Practically every day they sent each other letters several pages long. Did the husband know that this was going on?”

“So they say.”

“Did you know him?”

“Only by sight.”

“What sort of man was he?”

“A man of the world and a collector.”

“A collector of what?”

“Medals, snuffboxes ... ”

“Did he mix very much with other people?”

“He entertained once a week in his Rue de Varenne house, and in autumn at his château at Saint-Sauveur-en-Bourbonnais.”

Maigret had pulled a wry face. On the one hand, he knew that all this was probably true, but at the same time the people concerned struck him as having no material existence.

“The Rue de Varenne,” he pointed out, “is only five minutes’ walk from here.”

“All the same, I’d be ready to swear that for fifty years my uncle and the Princess never met.”

“Although they wrote to each other every day?”

“You’ve got the letters in front of you.”

“And the husband knew all about it?”

“Isabelle would never have agreed to conduct a correspondence behind his back.”

Maigret felt almost tempted to lose his temper, as if somebody had been poking fun at him. And yet there the letters were, before his very eyes, full of revealing passages.

“ ... this morning, at eleven o’clock, the Abbé Gauge called to see me and we talked a great deal about you. It is a comfort to me to know that the bonds which join us are of a sort that men are powerless to break ... ”

“Is the Princess very devout?”

“She has had a chapel consecrated in her house in the Rue de Varenne.”

“And her husband?”

“He was a Catholic too.”

“He had mistresses?”

“So they say.”

Another letter, from a more recent bundle:

“ ... I shall be grateful to Hubert all my life for having understood ... ”

“I suppose that Hubert is the Prince de V— ?”

“Yes. He was once a staff-officer at the cavalry school of Saumur. Every morning he went riding in the Bois de Boulogne until last week, when he was thrown from his horse.”

“How old was he?”

“Eighty.”

In this case there was nobody but old people, with relations between them which did not seem human.

“You are quite sure about all that you have told me, Monsieur Mazeron?”

“If you have any doubts, ask anybody you like.”

Anybody in a world of which Maigret had only a vague and doubtless inaccurate idea!

“Let’s continue,” he sighed wearily. “This is the Prince who, you told me earlier, has just died?”

“On Sunday morning, yes. It was in all the papers. He died from the effects of his riding accident and the funeral is taking

place at this very moment at Sainte-Clotilde.”

“He never had anything to do with your uncle?”

“Not as far as I know.”

“And what happened if they met at some social gathering?”

“I imagine they avoided frequenting the same salons and the same clubs.”

“They hated each other?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Did your uncle ever talk to you about the Prince?”

“No. He never mentioned him.”

“And what about Isabelle?”

“He told me, a long time ago, that I was his sole heir and that it was a pity I didn’t bear his name. It saddened him too that I had two daughters and no son. If I had had a son, he added, he would have applied for a decree allowing the latter to bear the name Saint-Hilaire.”

“So you are your uncle’s sole heir?”

“Yes. But I haven’t finished what I was telling you. Indirectly, without mentioning any names, he spoke to me that day of the Princess. He said something to this effect:

“ ‘I still hope to marry one day, heaven knows when, but it will be too late to have any children ... ’ ”

“If I’ve understood you correctly, this is the situation. About 1910 your uncle met a girl whom he loved and who loved him, but they didn’t get married because the Comte de Saint-Hilaire was practically penniless.”

“That’s correct.”

“Two years later, when your uncle was in an embassy in Poland or somewhere else, young Isabelle made a marriage of convenience and became the Princesse de V—. She has a son, so it wasn’t an unconsummated marriage. The couple must have lived together as husband and wife, at least at the time.”

“Yes.”

“Unless in the meantime Isabelle and your uncle had seen each other again and given way to their passion.”

“No.”

“How can you be so sure? You think that in that particular world ... ”

“I say no because my uncle spent the whole of the First World War away from France, and when he came back the child, Philippe, was two or three years old.”

“All right. The sweethearts saw each other again ... ”

“No.”

“They never saw each other again?”

“I’ve already told you so.”

“For fifty years, then, they wrote to each other practically every day, and one day your uncle spoke to you about a marriage which was to take place in a more or less distant future. Which means, I suppose, that he and Isabelle were waiting for the Prince to die in order to get married.”

“I imagine so.”

Maigret mopped his forehead and looked at the linden-tree outside the French window, as if he needed to resume contact with a more humdrum reality.

“Now we come to the epilogue. Ten or twelve days ago—the exact date doesn’t matter—the eighty-year-old Prince was thrown from his horse in the Bois de Boulogne. On Sunday morning, he died from his injuries. Yesterday, Tuesday, that is to say two days later, your uncle was killed in his study. The consequence is that the two old people, who for fifty years had been waiting for the time to come when they could finally be joined together, won’t be joined together after all. Is that right? Thank you, Monsieur Mazon. Now will you please give me your wife’s address.”

“23, Rue de la Pompe, at Passy.”

“Do you know the name of your uncle’s solicitor?”

“His solicitor is Maître Aubonnet, of the Rue de Villersexel.”

Again a few hundred yards away. All these people, with the exception of Madame Mazeron, lived practically next-door to one another, in the district of Paris with which Maigret was least familiar.

“You are free to go now. I suppose I can always find you at your shop?”

“I shan’t be there very much this afternoon, because I shall have to make arrangements for the funeral and the announcement of my uncle’s death, and first of all I intend to get in touch with Maître Aubonnet.”

Mazeron had left reluctantly and Jaquette, suddenly appearing from her kitchen, had gone to shut the door behind him.

“Do you need me at the moment?”

“Not just now. It’s lunchtime. We shall be back this afternoon.”

“Am I obliged to stay here?”

“Where would you go?”

She had looked at him as if she did not understand.

“I asked you where you intended to go.”

“Me? Nowhere. Where would I go, indeed?”

On account of her attitude, Maigret and Janvier had not left straight away. Maigret had telephoned to the Quai des Orfèvres.

“Lucas? Have you got somebody there who could come and spend an hour or two in the rue Saint-Dominique? Torrence? Fine! Tell him to take a car ... ”

With the result that while the two men were lunching, Torrence, for his part, was dozing in the Comte de Saint-Hilaire’s arm-chair.

As far as they could see, nothing had been stolen from the flat. Nobody had broken in. The murderer had come in through the door, and since Jaquette swore that she had let nobody in, they were forced to conclude that the Comte himself had opened the door to his visitor.

Was he expecting him? Or was he not? He hadn't offered him a drink. They had found only one glass on the desk, next to the bottle of brandy.

Would Saint-Hilaire have stayed in his dressing-gown to receive a woman? Probably not, judging by the little they knew about him.

So it was a man who had come to see him. The Count hadn't been suspicious of him, since he had sat down at his desk, in front of the proofs which he had been correcting a few minutes earlier.

"You didn't notice if there were any cigarette-ends in the ash-tray?"

"I don't think so."

"No cigar-stubs either?"

"No."

"I bet you that before tonight we'll have a phone call from young Monsieur Cromières."

He was another one who had the knack of getting Maigret's back up.

"The Prince's funeral must be over by now."

"Probably."

"So Isabelle will be at home now in the Rue de Varenne, together with her son, her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren."

There was a silence. Maigret frowned as if he could not make up his mind about something.

"Are you going to go and see them?" Janvier asked, with a certain anxiety in his voice.

“No ... Not with people like that ... Are you having coffee? ... Waiter! Two black coffees ... ”

One would have sworn that he had a grudge against everybody today, even including the more or less high-ranking officials who were lunching at the neighbouring tables and eyeing him ironically.

III



As soon as he turned the corner of the Rue Saint-Dominique, Maigret saw them and let out a groan. There were a good dozen of them, reporters and photographers, in front of the Comte de Saint-Hilaire's house, and some of them had sat down on the pavement with their backs against the wall, as if in readiness for a long siege.

They for their part had recognized him from a distance, and they rushed up to him.

"This is going to please our dear Monsieur Cromières!" he muttered to Janvier.

It was inevitable. As soon as a case was reported to a local police-station, there was always somebody who told the Press.

The photographers, who had dozens of pictures of him in their files, all took fresh shots of him, as if he looked different from the day before or any other day. The reporters started asking questions. These, fortunately, showed that they knew less about the case than might have been feared.

"Is it suicide, Chief-Inspector?"

"Have any documents disappeared?"

"For the moment, gentlemen, I have nothing to say."

"Can we assume that it's probably a political affair?"

They walked backwards in front of him, with their notebooks in their hands.

"When will you be able to give us a statement?"

"Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps a week from now."

He made the mistake of adding:

"Perhaps never."

He tried to correct the slip he had made.

“I’m joking, of course. Now please help us by letting us work in peace.”

“Is it true that he was writing his memoirs?”

“So true that two volumes have already been published.”

A policeman in uniform was standing outside the door. A few moments later, in response to Maigret’s ring at the bell, Torrence, in shirtsleeves, came and opened the door to him.

“I had to send for a policeman, Chief. They had got into the building and were having fun ringing the bell every five minutes.”

“Nothing new? No phone calls?”

“Twenty or thirty. The papers.”

“Where’s the old girl?”

“In the kitchen. Every time the phone rings, she rushes to it in the hope of answering before I do. The first time, she tried to snatch the receiver out of my hands.”

“She hasn’t made any phone calls herself, has she? You know there’s another phone in the bedroom?”

“I left the study door open so that I could hear her coming and going. She hasn’t been into the bedroom.”

“She hasn’t been out?”

“No. She tried to once, to go and get some new bread, so she told me. As you hadn’t left me any instructions on that point, I decided not to let her go. What do I do now?”

“You go back to the Quai.”

For a moment, the chief-inspector had thought of going back there himself, and taking Jaquette, whom he wanted to question at leisure. But he didn’t feel prepared for this interrogation. He preferred to stay a little longer in the flat and in the end it would probably be in Saint-Hilaire’s study that he would try to get the old servant to talk.

In the meantime, he opened the lofty French window to its full extent and sat down in the chair which the Count had so

often occupied. His hand was reaching out towards one of the bundles of letters when the door opened. It was Jaquette Larrieu, more sour-tempered and suspicious than ever.

“You haven’t any right to do that.”

“You know who these letters are from?”

“It doesn’t matter whether I do or don’t. It’s a private correspondence.”

“You will do me the favour of going back to the kitchen or your bedroom.”

“Can’t I go out?”

“Not yet.”

She hesitated, searching for a cutting reply, which she failed to find, and finally, pale with anger, left the study.

“Janvier, go and fetch me that photograph in a silver frame that I saw this morning in the bedroom.”

Maigret had not paid much attention to it in the morning. Too many things had still been unfamiliar to him. It was a principle with him not to try to form an opinion too quickly, for he distrusted first impressions.

During lunch at the restaurant, he had suddenly remembered a lithograph which he had seen for years in his parents’ bedroom. It must have been his mother who had chosen it and hung it up. The frame was white, in the style fashionable at the beginning of the century. The picture showed a young woman on the shore of a lake, wearing a princess dress, with a wide ostrich-feather hat on her head and a sunshade in her hand. The expression on her face was melancholy, like the landscape, and Maigret was sure that his mother considered the picture to be highly poetic. Wasn’t that the poetry of the period?

The story of Isabelle and the Comte de Saint-Hilaire had brought back the memory of that picture to him so clearly that he could see even the wallpaper with the pale-blue stripes in his parents’ room.

Now inside the silver frame which he had noticed in the morning in the Count's bedroom and which Janvier brought along to him, he discovered the same figure, a dress in the same style, an identical melancholy.

He had no doubt that it was a photograph of Isabelle about 1910, when she was still a young girl and when the future ambassador had met her.

She was not very tall, and she seemed to have a slim waist, possibly because of the corset she was wearing, while her bust, as they used to call it in those days, was rather large. Her features were finely chiselled, her lips thin, her eyes a pale blue or grey.

“What do I do now, Chief?”

“Sit down.”

He needed somebody there, as if to check his impressions. In front of him, the bundles of letters were arranged year by year and he took them one after another, not reading everything of course, for that would have taken him several days, but a passage here and there.

My good friend ... Dearest friend ... Sweet friend ...

Later on, perhaps because she felt in closer harmony with her correspondent, she wrote simply: *Friend*.

Saint-Hilaire had kept the envelopes, which bore stamps of various countries. Isabelle had travelled a great deal. For a long time, for instance, her August letters were written from Baden-Baden or Marienbad, the aristocratic spas of the time.

There were also letters from the Tyrol, and a good many from Switzerland and Portugal. She recounted in a self-satisfied, lively manner the little happenings which filled her day and gave quite witty descriptions of the people she met. Often she referred to them just by their surnames, sometimes by a mere initial.

Maigret took some time to find his bearings. With the help of the stamp on the envelope and the context of the reference, he gradually managed to solve these conundrums.

Maria, for instance, was a queen still reigning at that time, the Queen of Rumania. It was from Bucharest, where she was staying at court with her father, that Isabelle was writing, and a year later she was at court in Italy.

‘My cousin H——.’

The name—that of the Prince of Hesse—was given in full in another letter, and there were others, all first or second cousins.

During the First World War, she sent her letters by way of the French Embassy in Madrid.

“My father explained to me yesterday that it is necessary for me to marry the Prince de V— whom you have met several times at home. I asked him for three days in which to consider the matter, and during this time I have wept a great deal ...”

Maigret puffed at his pipe, shot an occasional glance at the garden, at the leaves of the linden-tree, and passed the letters one by one to Janvier, studying his reactions.

He felt a mild irritation in the face of these evocations which seemed so unreal to him. As a child, hadn’t he looked with the same sort of embarrassment at the woman on the shore of the lake, in his parents’ bedroom? In his eyes, she had been an unreal, impossible creature, surrounded by a false poetry.

Yet here, in a world which had evolved further, which had grown much harder, he had found, in a living person, a very similar picture.

“This afternoon, I had a long conversation with Hubert and I was absolutely frank. He knows that I love you, that we are separated by too many obstacles, and that I am yielding to my father’s wishes ...”

Only the week before, Maigret had had to deal with a simple, brutal crime of passion, the case of a lover who had stabbed to death the husband of the woman he loved, had then killed the woman, and had finally tried unsuccessfully to cut open his veins. It is true that this took place in the lower-class district of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

“He has agreed that our marriage shall remain unconsummated and I for my part have promised never to see you again. He has a high regard for you and does not question the respect you have always shown me ... ”

There were moments when Maigret felt an almost physical sense of revolt.

“Do you believe it, Janvier?”

The inspector was baffled.

“She sounds as if she meant it ... ”

“Read this one!”

It was three years later.

I know, friend, that this is going to hurt you, but if it is any consolation to you, it hurts me even more than it does you ... ”

It was in 1915. She announced that Julien, the Prince de V — ’s brother, had just been killed in Argonne at the head of his regiment. Once again, she had had a long conversation with her husband, who had come to Paris on leave.

What she told the man she loved was, to put it briefly, that she was going to have to sleep with the Prince. She did not use those terms of course. Not only was there not a single brutal or shocking word in her letter, but the subject itself was treated in an almost immaterial fashion.

“As long as Julien was alive, Hubert did not worry, feeling sure that his brother would have an heir and that the name of V— — ... ”

The brother was no longer there. It was accordingly Hubert’s duty to ensure the continuation of the family.

“I spent the night in prayer and in the morning I went to see my confessor ... ”

The priest had shared the Prince’s opinion. One could not, for a question of love, allow a name to die out which, for the past five centuries, had been found on every page of the history of France.

“I understood where my duty lay ... ”

The sacrifice had taken place, since a child, Philippe, had been born. She announced the birth too, and on this subject there was a phrase which gave Maigret pause:

“Thank God, it is a boy ... ”

Wasn't that saying, in black and white, that if the child had been a girl, she would have had to start all over again?

And if she had had another girl, and then another ...

“You've read it?”

“Yes.”

It was as if they had both fallen prey to the same feeling of discomfort. They were both of them accustomed to a somewhat crude reality, and the passions with which they came in contact usually took a dramatic turn seeing that they ended up at the Quai des Orfèvres.

Here, on the other hand, it was as difficult as trying to catch hold of a cloud. And when they attempted to grasp the characters, the latter remained as nebulous and unsubstantial as the lady of the lake.

For two pins Maigret would have stuffed all these letters into the green-curtained bookcase, muttering as he did so:

“A lot of rubbish!”

At the same time, he was filled with a certain respect which bordered on emotion. Not wanting to be taken in, he tried to harden his heart.

“Do you believe it all?”

More dukes, princes and dethroned monarchs met in Portugal. Then a journey to Kenya, in the husband's company. Another journey, to the United States this time, where Isabelle had felt rather at a loss because life there was too coarse for her liking.

“ ... The bigger he grows, the more Philippe resembles you. Isn't it miraculous? Isn't it as if Heaven wanted to reward us for our sacrifice? Hubert has noticed it too, I can see that from the way he looks at the child ... ”

Hubert, in any case, was no longer admitted to the marriage bed and he did not fail to look elsewhere for consolation. In the letters, he was not Hubert any more, but H ...

“Poor H. has a new folly and I suspect that she is making him suffer. He is growing visibly thinner and becoming more and more irritable ... ”

Follies of this kind recurred every five or six months. For his part, Armand de Saint-Hilaire, in his letters, obviously made no attempt to convince his correspondent that he was leading a life of chastity.

Isabelle wrote to him, for instance:

“I hope that the women of Turkey are not as unapproachable as people say and above all that their husbands are not too ferocious ... ”

She added:

“Be careful, friend. Every morning, I pray for you ... ”

When he was French Minister in Cuba, then Ambassador in Buenos Aires, she worried about the women of Spanish blood.

“They are so beautiful! And I, far away and forgotten, tremble at the idea that one day you may fall in love ... ”

She showed an interest in his health.

“Are your boils still giving you trouble? In this heat, they must be ... ”

She knew Jaquette.

“I am writing to Jaquette to give her the recipe for the almond tart you like so much ... ”

“Hadn’t she promised her husband never to see Saint-Hilaire again? ... Listen to this ... It’s from a letter sent to this address:

“ ‘What an ineffable yet painful joy it was for me yesterday to see you from a distance at the Opera ... I like your greying temples, and a slight paunch gives you an incomparable air of dignity ... All evening I was proud of you ... It was only when I got back to the Rue de Varenne and looked at myself in

the mirror that I felt frightened ... How could I have failed to disappoint you? ... Women fade quickly and I am now almost an old woman ... ' "

They had seen each other like that, from a distance, fairly frequently. They even gave each other assignations of a sort.

"Tomorrow, about three o'clock, I shall go for a walk in the Tuileries Gardens with my son ... "

Saint-Hilaire, for his part, passed underneath her windows at times fixed in advance.

When her son was about ten years old, there was a characteristic reference to him which Maigret read out aloud.

"Philippe, finding me busy writing once more, asked me innocently: 'Are you writing to your sweetheart again?' "

Maigret heaved a sigh, mopped his forehead, and tied the bundles up again one after another.

"Try to get me Doctor Tudelle on the phone."

He needed to find himself back on solid ground. The letters had been returned to their place in the bookcase and he promised himself not to touch them again.

"He's on the line, Chief ... "

"Hullo, doctor ... Yes, Maigret speaking ... You finished ten minutes ago? ... No, of course I'm not asking you for all the details ... "

While he was listening, he scribbled words and meaningless symbols on Saint-Hilaire's pad.

"You're sure of that? ... You've already sent the bullets to Gastine-Renette? ... I'll phone him a little later ... Thank you ... The best thing to do would be to send your report to the examining magistrate ... That would please him ... Thank you again ... "

He started walking up and down the room with his hands behind his back, stopping now and then to look at the garden where a cheeky blackbird was hopping around in the grass a few feet away from him.

“The first bullet,” he explained to Janvier, “was fired from the front, practically at point-blank range ... It’s a .301 bullet in a nickel-plated copper envelope ... Tudelle isn’t as experienced as Doctor Paul yet, but he’s pretty certain that it was fired from a Browning automatic ... He’s absolutely definite on one point: that first bullet caused almost instantaneous death. The body fell forward and slipped from the arm-chair on to the carpet ... ”

“How does he know?”

“Because the other shots were fired from above.”

“How many others?”

“Three. Two in the stomach and one in the shoulder. Seeing that automatics hold six cartridges, or seven if you slip one into the barrel, I wonder why the murderer suddenly stopped firing after the fourth bullet. Unless of course the gun jammed ... ”

He glanced at the carpet, which had been cleaned after a fashion, but where the outline of the bloodstains was still visible.

“Either the killer wanted to make sure that his victim was dead, or else he was in such a state of excitement that he went on firing automatically. Get me Moers, will you?”

He had been too impressed, that morning, by the unusual aspect of the case to attend to the material clues himself, and he had left all that to the experts from the Criminal Records Office.

“Moers? ... Yes ... How are you getting on? ... Yes, of course ... First of all, did you find the cartridge-cases in the study? ... No? ... Not one? ... ”

That was strange and seemed to suggest that the murderer knew that he was not going to be disturbed. After four loud shots—very loud shots if the gun was a .301 automatic—he had taken the time to search the room for the cartridge-cases which would have been ejected quite a long way.

“The doorhandle?”

“The only prints that are reasonably clear are the servant’s.”

“The brandy-glass?”

“The dead man’s prints.”

“The desk and the rest of the furniture?”

“Not a thing, Chief. I mean there aren’t any foreign prints apart from yours.”

“—The lock and the windows?”

“—The enlargements of our photos show no signs of a forced entry.”

Isabelle’s letters might not resemble those of the lovers Maigret usually had to deal with, but the crime was real enough.

Two details, however, seemed at first sight to contradict one another. The murderer had gone on firing at a dead man, at a man who had stopped moving and who, with his head shattered, presented a horrifying sight. Maigret remembered the white hair, still quite plentiful, sticking to the gaping skull, one eye which had stayed open, and a bone protruding from the torn cheek.

The medical expert stated that after the first shot the corpse was on the floor, in front of the arm-chair, in the place where it had been found.

This meant that the murderer, who had probably been standing on the other side of the desk, had walked round in order to fire again once, twice, three times, from above, at close quarters, less than two feet away according to Tudelle.

At that distance, there was no need to take aim in order to hit a given spot. In other words, it seemed that he had hit the chest and stomach on purpose.

Didn’t that suggest an act of vengeance, or an exceptional degree of hatred?

“You’re sure there isn’t a gun anywhere in the flat? You hunted everywhere?”

“Even up the chimney,” answered Janvier.

Maigret too had looked for the automatic which the old servant had mentioned, admittedly in rather vague terms.

“Go and ask the policeman on duty at the door if it isn’t a .301 that he’s carrying in his holster.”

A good many uniformed policemen were equipped with a gun of that calibre.

“Get him to lend it to you for a minute.”

He too went out of the study, crossed the corridor, and pushed open the door of the kitchen, where Jaquette Larrieu was sitting on a chair, holding herself very stiffly. Her eyes were shut and she looked as if she were asleep. She started at the noise.

“Will you come with me ... ”

“Where?”

“Into the study. I should like to ask you a few questions.”

“I have already told you that I don’t know anything.”

Once in the room, she looked all round her as if to make sure that nothing had been disturbed.

“Sit down.”

She hesitated, unaccustomed, no doubt, to sitting down in this room in her employer’s presence.

“In that chair, please ... ”

She obeyed reluctantly, looking at the chief-inspector more suspiciously than ever.

Janvier came back with an automatic in his hand.

“Give it to her.”

She shrank from taking it, opened her mouth to say something, then shut it again. Maigret could have sworn that she had been on the point of asking:

“Where did you find it?”

The weapon fascinated her. She found it difficult to take her eyes off it.

“You recognize this gun?”

“How can you expect me to recognize it? I have never examined it closely and I don’t imagine it’s the only one of its kind.”

“It *is* the type of weapon the Count possessed, though?”

“I suppose so.”

“The same size?”

“I can’t say.”

“Hold it in your hand. Is it roughly the same weight?”

She flatly refused to do what they asked.

“It wouldn’t be any use, seeing that I have never touched the one that was in the drawer.”

“You can take it back to the policeman, Janvier.”

“You don’t need me any more?”

“Stay where you are, please. I suppose you don’t know whether your master ever gave or lent his pistol to anybody, to his nephew for instance, or to somebody else?”

“How should I know? All I know is that I haven’t seen it for a long time.”

“Was the Comte de Saint-Hilaire afraid of burglars?”

“Certainly not. Neither burglars nor murderers. The proof of that is that in summer he used to sleep with his window open, even though we are on the ground floor and anybody could have got into his bedroom.”

“He didn’t keep any valuables in the flat?”

“You and your men know better than I do what there is there.”

“When did you enter his service?”

“Straight after the 1914 war. He had just come back from abroad. His valet had died.”

“Then you were about twenty years old at the time?”

“Twenty-eight.”

“How long had you been in Paris?”

“A few months. Before that, I had lived with my father in Normandy. When my father died, I had to find a job.”

“Had you had any affairs?”

“What did you say?”

“I asked you whether you had had any sweethearts, or a fiancé.”

She looked at him resentfully.

“Nothing like what you are thinking.”

“So you lived alone in this flat with the Comte de Saint-Hilaire?”

“Is there anything wrong in that?”

Maigret was not asking questions in any logical order, for nothing struck him as logical in this case, and he moved from one subject to another as if he were looking for the tender spot. Janvier, who had come back into the room, had sat down near the door. When he lit a cigarette and dropped the match on the floor, the old woman, who did not miss anything, called him to order.

“You might use an ash-tray.”

“Incidentally, did your master smoke?”

“He did for a long time.”

“Cigarettes?”

“Cigars.”

“And recently he stopped smoking?”

“Yes. On account of his chronic bronchitis.”

“But he seemed to be in excellent health.”

Doctor Tudelle had told Maigret, over the telephone, that Saint-Hilaire had obviously enjoyed exceptionally good health.

“A sound body, the heart in perfect condition, no sign of sclerosis.”

But certain organs had been too badly damaged by the bullets to allow a complete diagnosis.

“When you entered his service, he was almost a young man.”

“He was seven years older than me.”

“You knew that he was in love?”

“I used to post his letters for him.”

“You weren’t jealous?”

“Why should I have been jealous?”

“You never happened to see the person he wrote to every day here in this flat?”

“She has never set foot in the flat.”

“But you have seen her?”

She made no reply.

“Answer my question. When the case goes to the Assizes, you will be asked much more embarrassing questions and you won’t be allowed to remain silent.”

“I don’t know anything.”

“I asked you whether you had seen this person.”

“Yes. She used to go past in the street. Sometimes too I took letters to her and delivered them to her personally.”

“In secret?”

“No. I asked to see her and I was taken along to her rooms.”

“Did she talk to you?”

“Sometimes she asked me questions.”

“You are talking about forty years ago, I suppose?”

“Then and more recently.”

“What sort of questions did she ask?”

“Mostly about Monsieur le Comte’s health.”

“Not about the people who came here?”

“No.”

“You accompanied your master abroad?”

“Everywhere!”

“As Minister, and later as Ambassador, he had to keep up a large establishment. What exactly was your function?”

“I looked after him.”

“You mean to say that you were not on the same footing as the other servants, that you didn’t have to bother about the cooking, the cleaning, the receptions?”

“I supervised.”

“What was your title? Housekeeper?”

“I didn’t have a title.”

“Have you had any lovers?”

She stiffened, her eyes more contemptuous than ever.

“Were you his mistress?”

Maigret was afraid that she was going to hurl herself at him with all her claws bared.

“I know from his correspondence,” he went on, “that he had several affairs.”

“He had a right to, hadn’t he?”

“Were you jealous?”

“I sometimes had to show certain persons the door, because they weren’t suitable for him and because they would have made trouble for him.”

“In other words, you looked after his private life.”

“He was too good-natured. He had remained very naïve.”

“Yet he filled the delicate role of ambassador with considerable distinction.”

“That isn’t the same thing.”

“You never left him?”

“Do the letters say I did?”

It was Maigret’s turn not to reply, to insist:

“How long were you parted from him?”

“Five months.”

“When was that?”

“When he was Minister in Cuba.”

“Why?”

“Because of a woman who insisted on him getting rid of me.”

“What sort of woman?”

Silence.

“Why couldn’t she stand you? Did she live with him?”

“She came to see him every day and often spent the night at the Legation.”

“Where did you go?”

“I took a little room near the Prado.”

“Did your master come to see you there?”

“He didn’t dare. He just used to ring me up to ask me to be patient. He knew perfectly well that it wouldn’t last. All the same, I bought my ticket to go back to Europe.”

“But you didn’t go?”

“He came to fetch me the day before I was due to leave.”

“Do you know Prince Philippe?”

“If you’ve really read the letters, you don’t need to ask me all these questions. It shouldn’t be allowed, going through somebody’s correspondence after he’s dead.”

“You haven’t answered my question.”

“I used to see him when he was young.”

“Where?”

“In the Rue de Varenne. He was often with his mother.”

“You didn’t think of ringing up the Princess this morning, before going to the Quai d’Orsay?”

She looked at him full in the face, without flinching.

“Why didn’t you, seeing that by your account, you had served for a long time as a link between them?”

“Because today was the day of the funeral.”

“And later this morning, while we were out of the house, weren’t you tempted to tell her what had happened?”

She stared at the telephone.

“There has always been somebody in the study.”

There was a knock at the door. It was the policeman on duty in the street.

“I don’t know if this is of any interest to you. I thought you might like to see the paper.”

It was an early edition of an evening paper which must have come out an hour before. A fairly prominent headline across two columns at the bottom of the front page announced:

MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF AMBASSADOR

The text was brief.

“This morning, at his home in the Rue Saint-Dominique, the body was discovered of the Comte Armand de Saint-Hilaire, who for many years served as French Ambassador in various capitals, including Rome, London and Washington.

“Since his retirement some years ago, Armand de Saint-Hilaire had published two volumes of memoirs, and he was correcting proofs of a third volume when, so it seems, he was murdered.

“The crime was discovered early this morning by an old servant.

“It is not yet known whether some mysterious motive is to be looked for.”

He handed the paper to Jaquette, and looked hesitantly at the telephone. He wondered whether they had read the paper in the Rue de Varenne, or whether somebody had already told Isabelle the news.

In that case, how was she going to react? Would she dare to come here herself? Would she send her son to make inquiries? Or would she just sit and wait in the silence of her house, where, as a sign of mourning, the shutters had doubtless been closed?

Shouldn't Maigret ...

He stood up, annoyed with himself, annoyed with everything, and went and planted himself in front of the French window, knocking his pipe out on his heel, to Jaquette's indignation.

IV



THE old woman, a small, erect figure on her chair, listened in amazement to the chief-inspector's voice, which had assumed a tone which she had not heard before. Admittedly it was not to her that Maigret was speaking, but to an invisible person at the other end of the line.

"No, Monsieur Cromières, I haven't issued any statement to the Press, and I haven't invited any reporters or photographers along as Ministers are so fond of doing. As for your second question, I haven't anything new to tell you, nor any ideas, as you put it, and if I discover anything I shall report it immediately to the examining magistrate ... "

He intercepted a furtive glance from Jaquette in Janvier's direction. She seemed to be calling the latter to witness the chief-inspector's ill-concealed anger, and there was a faint smile on her lips, rather as if she were saying to the inspector:

Well, well! Just listen to your chief!"

Maigret took his companion out into the corridor.

“I’m going to nip round to the solicitor’s. Go on asking her questions, not pressing her too hard, but gently—you know what I mean. You may appeal to her more than I do.”

It was true. If he had realized, before setting out that morning, that he was going to have to deal with a tough old maid, he would have brought along young Lapointe rather than Janvier, because, of all the inspectors at Police Headquarters, it was Lapointe who had the greatest success with middle-aged women. One had actually said to him, shaking her head sadly:

“I wonder how a well-bred young man like you can carry on this profession!”

She had added:

“I’m sure it must go against the grain!”

The chief-inspector found himself in the street again, where the reporters had left one of their number on duty while they went to have a drink in a nearby pub.

“Nothing new, old chap ... It isn’t worth your while to follow me ... ”

He was not going far. There was never any need to go far in this case. It was as if, for all those who were remotely or closely connected with it, Paris were reduced to a few aristocratic streets.

The solicitor’s house, in the Rue de Villersexel, was of the same period and the same style as that in the Rue Saint-Dominique, with a carriage entrance too, a wide staircase with a red carpet, and a lift which probably went up smoothly and noiselessly. He did not need to use it, for the office was on the first floor. The brass handles of the double doors were highly polished, as was the plate asking visitors to go in without ringing.

“If I find myself faced with another old man ... ”

He was pleasantly surprised to see, among the clerks, a good-looking woman of about thirty.

“Maître Aubonnet, please!”

True, the office was a little too quiet, a trifle austere, but he was not kept waiting and was shown almost immediately into a huge room where a man aged forty-five at the most stood up to greet him.

“Chief-Inspector Maigret ... I have come to see you about one of your clients, the Comte de Saint-Hilaire ... ”

The other man replied with a smile:

“In that case, it isn’t a matter for me but for my father. I’ll go and see if he’s available just now.”

The younger Maître Aubonnet went into another room and stayed there for some time.

“Will you come this way, Monsieur Maigret ... ”

This time, of course, the chief-inspector found himself in the presence of a real old man, who was not even in very good condition. The elder Aubonnet was sitting in a high-backed arm-chair, blinking his eyes with the bewildered expression of a man who has just been roused from his afternoon nap.

Maître Aubonnet had obviously been very fat at one time. He had retained a certain corpulence, but his body was flabby, with folds everywhere. He was wearing a shoe on one foot and a felt slipper on the other, the ankle of which was swollen.

“I suppose you’ve come to talk to me about my poor old friend? ... ”

The mouth was slack too, and the syllables which emerged from it formed a sort of paste. On the other hand, there was no need to ask any questions to start him talking.

“Just imagine, Saint-Hilaire and I first met at Stanislas ... That’s how many years ago? ... Wait a moment ... I’m seventy-seven ... So it’s sixty years now since we were in the sixth form together ... He intended to enter the Foreign Service ... My own dream was to join the Saumur cavalry ... They still had horses in those days ... They weren’t all motorized ... You know, I’ve never had a chance to do any riding in the whole of my life? ... All because I was an only son and I had to take over my father’s office ... ”

Maigret forbore to ask him whether this father of his was already living in the same house at that time.

“Even in his school-days, Saint-Hilaire was a *bon vivant*, but a *bon vivant* of a rather rare type, a person of tremendous distinction ... ”

“I suppose he has left a will with you?”

“His nephew, young Mazon, asked me the same question just now. I was able to set his mind at rest ... ”

“Does the nephew inherit everything?”

“Not the whole estate, no. I know the will by heart, since it was I who drew it up.”

“A long time ago?”

“The last will dates back ten years or so.”

“Were the previous wills different?”

“Only in minor particulars. I wasn’t able to show the nephew the document, seeing that all the interested parties have to be present.”

Who are they?”

“Broadly speaking, Alain Mazon inherits the block of flats in the Rue Saint-Dominique and the bulk of the fortune, which in any case isn’t very great. Jaquette Larrieu, the housekeeper, receives a pension which will enable her to end her days in comfort. As for the furniture, knick-knacks, pictures, and personal belongings, Saint-Hilaire bequeaths them to an old friend ... ”

“Isabelle de V— .”

“I see you know all about it.”

“Do you know her?”

“Fairly well. I knew her husband better, because he was one of my clients.”

Wasn’t it rather surprising to see the two men choosing the same solicitor?

“They weren’t afraid of running into each other in your office?”

“That never happened. The idea that it might probably never occurred to them, and I don’t know that they would have found it terribly embarrassing. You see, they were made, if not to be friends, at least to have a high regard for each other, for they were both of them men of honour and, what is more, men of taste ... ”

Even the words he used seemed to come from the past. It was a long time, in fact, since Maigret had last heard the expression *man of honour*.

The old solicitor, in his arm-chair, shook with silent laughter at a fleeting thought.

“Men of taste, yes,” he repeated maliciously, “and you could add that in one respect they had identical tastes ... Now they are dead, I don’t think I am betraying a professional secret in telling you this, particularly as you too are obliged to be discreet ... A solicitor is nearly always a confidant ... Apart from that, Saint-Hilaire was an old friend who used to come and tell me all about his pranks ... For about a year, the Prince and he had the same mistress, a lovely girl with an opulent bosom who was appearing in some boulevard revue or other ... They didn’t know ... Each had his own day ... ”

The old man gave Maigret a meaning look.

“Those people knew how to live ... For several years now, I have had hardly anything to do with the office, where my eldest son has taken my place ... All the same, I come downstairs to my office every day and I go on helping my old clients ... ”

“Did Saint-Hilaire have many friends?”

“The same was true of his friends as of the clients I mentioned just now. At our age, you see people dying off one after another. I do believe that in the end I was the last person he used to visit. He had kept the full use of his legs, and he still went for a walk every day. He sometimes came up here to see me, sitting where you are sitting now ... ”

“What did you talk about?”

“About the old days, of course, and especially the boys we knew at Stanislas. I could still give you most of the names. It’s astonishing, how many of them have had distinguished careers. One of our schoolmates, who wasn’t the most intelligent, was Prime Minister I don’t know how many times and died only last year. Another is a military member of the Academy ...”

“Had Saint-Hilaire made any enemies?”

“How could he have made any? On the professional level, he never jostled anybody out of a position, as is so often the case nowadays. He obtained his posts by patiently waiting his turn. And in his memoirs, he didn’t pay off any old scores, which explains why few people have read them ...”

“And what about the V—’s?”

The solicitor looked at him in surprise.

“I’ve already spoken to you about the Prince. He knew the whole story, of course, and he knew that Saint-Hilaire would keep his word. If it hadn’t been for society, I’m convinced that Armand would have been received at the house in the Rue de Varenne and that he might even have had his place at table there.”

“The son knows all about it too?”

“Certainly.”

“What is he like?”

“I don’t think he has anything like his father’s intelligence. It’s true that I don’t know him as well as I knew his father. He seems far less communicative, which is probably due to the difficulty, in our day and age, of bearing a name as heavy as his. Social life doesn’t interest him. He is very rarely to be seen in Paris. He spends most of the year in Normandy, with his wife and children, looking after his farms and his horses ...”

“Have you seen him recently?”

“I shall be seeing him tomorrow, as well as his mother, at the reading of the will, so that I shall probably have to deal with both estates on the same day.”

“The Princess hasn’t rung you up this afternoon?”

“Not yet. If she reads the papers, or if somebody tells her the news, she will doubtless get in touch with me. I still can’t understand why anybody should murder my old friend. If it had happened anywhere except in his own home, I should have sworn that the murderer had killed the wrong person by mistake.”

“I suppose Jaquette Larrieu was his mistress?”

“That isn’t the right word. Mind you, Saint-Hilaire never talked to me about her. But I knew him. I knew Jaquette too, when she was young, and she was a very pretty girl. Now, Armand rarely let a pretty girl come within reach without trying his luck. He did that in an aesthetic spirit, if you see what I mean. And it’s more than likely that, if the opportunity occurred ... ”

“Jaquette hasn’t any relatives?”

“I don’t know of any. If she had any brothers and sisters, the odds are that they died a long time ago.”

“Thank you very much ... ”

“I suppose you are in a hurry? In any case, don’t forget that I remain entirely at your service. You look a decent fellow too, and I hope you find the scoundrel who’s responsible.”

Always this impression of being immersed in a distant past, in a world which had, so to speak, vanished. It was bewildering to find oneself back in the street, in a living Paris, with women in tight-fitting trousers doing their shopping, bars full of nickel-plated furniture, cars throbbing in front of traffic-lights.

He made for the Rue Jacob, but all in vain, for on the door of the shuttered shop he found a card framed in black which announced:

“Closed on account of death in the family.”

He pressed the bell several times without getting any reply, and crossed over to the other pavement to look at the windows on the first floor. They were open but there was no sound to be heard. A woman with copper-coloured hair and big, slack breasts, emerged from the darkness of a picture-gallery.

“If it’s Monsieur Mazon you want, he isn’t at home. I saw him go off about midday after closing his shutters.”

She didn’t know where he had gone.

“He doesn’t talk much to other people ... ”

Maigret could go and see Isabelle de V— of course, but the thought of that particular visit daunted him slightly, and he preferred to put it off until later, trying in the meantime to find out a little more.

He had rarely felt so nonplussed by other human beings. Would a psychiatrist, a schoolmaster or a novelist, to quote the list in the *Lancet*, have been in a better position to understand people from another century?

One thing was certain: the Comte Armand de Saint-Hilaire, a gentle, inoffensive old fellow, a man of honour, to use the solicitor’s expression, had been murdered, in his own house, by somebody about whom he had no suspicions.

The possibility that this was an unpremeditated, accidental crime, a stupid, anonymous murder, could be ruled out, first of all because nothing had disappeared, and secondly because the former ambassador had been sitting peacefully at his desk when the first bullet, fired at close quarters, had struck him in the face.

Either he had gone to open the door to his visitor himself, or else the latter had a key to the flat, although Jaquette maintained that there were only two keys in existence, hers and the Count’s.

Maigret, still turning over these rather confused thoughts in his head, went into a bar, ordered a glass of beer and shut himself up in the call-box.

“Is that you, Moers? ... Have you got the inventory in front of you? ... Will you look and see if there’s any mention of a

key ... The key to the flat, yes ... What's that? ... Yes? ... Where did they find it? ... In his trouser-pocket? ... Thank you ... Nothing new? ... No ... I shall be coming back to the Quai late in the day ... If you've anything to tell me, ring Janvier, who has stayed behind in the Rue Saint-Dominique ... ”

They had found one of the two keys in the dead man's trouser-pocket, and Jaquette had hers too, since she had used it to open the door that morning, when Maigret and the man from the Foreign Office had followed her into the ground-floor flat.

People didn't commit murder without a motive. What remained, once theft had been ruled out? A crime of passion, between two old men? A matter of money?

Jaquette Larrieu, according to the solicitor, received a more than adequate pension for the rest of her life.

The nephew, for his part, inherited the block of flats and the bulk of the estate.

As for Isabelle, it was hard to imagine that, almost immediately after her husband's death, the idea should have occurred to her ...

No, there was no satisfactory explanation, and the Quai d'Orsay for its part categorically ruled out any political motive.

“Rue de la Pompe!” he said to the driver of a yellow taxi.

“Right, Chief-Inspector.”

A long time ago now, he had stopped feeling flattered at being recognized like that. The concierge directed him to the fifth floor, where a pretty little brunette began by opening the door an inch or so before showing Maigret into a flat which was ablaze with sunshine.

“Excuse the mess ... I was busy making a dress for my daughter ... ”

She was wearing tight-fitting trousers in black silk which showed the shape of her plump buttocks.

“I suppose you’ve come to see me about the murder, though I don’t know what you hope to find out from me.”

“Your children aren’t here?”

“My elder daughter is in England to learn the language. She’s living with a family, *au pair*, and my younger daughter is working. It’s for her that I’m ... ”

She pointed to the table, where there was some light, coloured material out of which she was cutting a dress.

“I suppose you’ve seen my husband?”

“Yes.”

“How is he taking it?”

“Is it a long time since you last saw him?”

“Nearly three years.”

“And the Comte de Saint-Hilaire?”

“The last time he came up here was just before Christmas. He brought some presents for my daughters. He never failed to remember. Even when he was in some post abroad and they were still little, he didn’t forget them at Christmas and always sent them some small gift. That’s how they come to have dolls from all over the world. You can still see them in their room.”

She was not more than forty years old and she had remained extremely attractive.

“Is it true, what the papers say? He was murdered?”

“Tell me about your husband.”

The life promptly went out of her face.

“What do you want me to say?”

“You married for love, didn’t you? Unless I’m mistaken, he is much older than you.”

“Only ten years. He has always looked older than he is.”

“You loved him?”

“I don’t know. I was living alone with my father, who was sour and embittered. He regarded himself as a great painter

who wasn't appreciated at his true value, and it grieved him to earn his living by restoring pictures. I for my part worked in a shop on the Grands Boulevards. I met Alain. Aren't you thirsty?"

"No thank you. I've just had a glass of beer. Go on ... "

"Perhaps it was the air of mystery about him that attracted me. He wasn't like other men, he talked very little, and what he said was always interesting. We got married and had a daughter straight away ... "

"You lived in the Rue Jacob?"

"Yes. I liked that street too, and our little first-floor flat. At that time, the Comte de Saint-Hilaire was still an ambassador, in Washington, unless I'm mistaken. During one of his leaves he came to see us, and later he invited us to the Rue Saint-Dominique. I was very impressed by him."

"How did he get on with your husband?"

"I can't really say. He was a man who was pleasant with everybody. He seemed surprised that I should be his nephew's wife."

"Why?"

"It was only much later that I thought I understood, and I'm still not sure. He must have known Alain better than I thought, certainly better than I did at the time ... "

She broke off, as if she were worried about what she had just said.

"I don't want to give you the impression that I'm talking like this out of spite, because my husband and I are separated. Besides, I'm the one who left."

"And he didn't try to stop you?"

Here the furniture was modern, the walls light-coloured, and he could see part of a neat white kitchen. Familiar noises rose from the street and nearby was the green expanse of the Bois de Boulogne.

"I trust you don't suspect Alain?"

“To be perfectly frank, I don’t suspect anybody yet, but I’m not ruling out any hypothesis *a priori*.”

“You’d be on the wrong track if you did, I’m sure of that. In my opinion, Alain is a poor devil who has never been able to adjust himself to life and never will be able to adjust himself. It’s surprising, isn’t it, that after leaving my father because he was embittered I should marry a man even more embittered than he was? It was a long time before I really noticed. The fact of the matter is, I’ve never seen him satisfied with anything, and I wonder now if he has ever smiled in the whole of his life.

“He worries about everything, about his health and his business, about what people think of him, about the way neighbours and customers look at him ...

“Everybody, he imagines, has a grudge against him.

“It’s difficult to explain. You mustn’t laugh at what I’m going to say. When I was living with him, I had the impression that I could hear him thinking from morning till night, and it was a sound as nerve-racking as the ticking of an alarm-clock. He used to come and go in silence, looking at me all of a sudden as if his eyes were turned towards the inside where I couldn’t tell what was happening. Is he still as pale as ever?”

“He is pale, yes.”

“He was already when I met him, and he stayed that way in the country and at the seaside. It was like an artificial pallor ...

“And nothing showed outside. It was impossible to make contact with him ... For years we slept in the same bed and sometimes, when I woke up, I found myself looking at him as if he were a stranger.

“He was cruel ... ”

She tried to take the word back.

“I’m probably exaggerating. He thought that he was fair, and he wanted to be fair at all costs. It was a mania with him. He was scrupulously fair and that’s what made me talk about cruelty. I noticed it most of all when we had the children. He

regarded them in the same way as he regarded me and other people, with a cold lucidity. If they did something naughty, I tried to defend them.

“ ”At their age, Alain ... ”

“ ‘*There’s no reason why they should get into the habit of cheating.*’

“That was one of his favourite words, Cheating ... Dirty tricks ...

“He was just as strict about the little details of everyday life:

“ ‘*Why did you buy fish?*’

“I tried to explain that ...

“*I said veal.*”

“ ‘When I went to do my shopping ... ’

“He stubbornly repeated:

“ ‘*I said veal, and you had no business to buy fish.*’ ”

She broke off again.

“I’m not talking too much, am I? I’m not saying silly things?”

“Go on.”

“I’ve finished. After a few years, I thought I could understand what the Americans mean by mental cruelty and why it has become grounds for divorce over there. There are schoolteachers, both men and women, who, without raising their voices, can impose a sort of reign of terror on their class.

“With Alain, we felt suffocated, my daughters and I, and we didn’t even have the consolation of seeing him go off to the office every morning. He was downstairs, under our feet, from morning till night, coming upstairs ten times a day to watch what we were doing with cold eyes.

“I had to account to him for every franc I spent. When I went out, he insisted on knowing which way I was going to go, and when I got back he questioned me about the people I

had spoken to, what I had said to them and what they had replied ... ”

“Were you unfaithful to him?”

She showed no indignation. Indeed, it seemed to Maigret that she was tempted to smile with a certain satisfaction, even a certain pleasure, but that she restrained herself.

“Why do you ask me that? Has somebody told you something about me?”

“No.”

“As long as I was living with him, I didn’t do anything he could hold against me.”

“What made you decide to leave him?”

“I was at the end of my tether. I was suffocating, as I told you, and I wanted my daughters to grow up in an atmosphere they could breathe freely.”

“You hadn’t a more personal reason for wanting to regain your freedom?”

“Perhaps.”

“Your daughters know about it?”

“I haven’t concealed the fact from them that I have a lover, and they back me up.”

“He lives with you?”

“I go and see him in his flat. He’s a widower of my age, who hadn’t been any happier with his wife than I had with my husband, so that it’s rather as if we were sticking the bits together again.”

“Does he live in this district?”

“In this building, two floors down. He’s a doctor. You’ll see his plate on the door. If, one day, Alain agrees to a divorce, we intend to get married, but I doubt if he will ever do that. He’s very Catholic, out of tradition rather than conviction.”

“Does your husband earn a good living?”

“He has his ups and downs. When I left him, it was agreed that he would pay me a modest allowance for the children. He kept his word for a few months. Then there were some delays. And finally he stopped paying completely, on the pretext that they were big enough to earn their living. But that doesn’t make him a murderer, does it?”

“Did you know about his uncle’s liaison?”

“Are you talking about Isabelle?”

“Had you heard that the Prince de V— died on Sunday morning and that he was buried today?”

“I read it in the paper.”

“Do you think that if Saint-Hilaire hadn’t been killed he would have married the Princess?”

“Probably. All his life he had hoped that they would be united one day. I found it touching to hear him talking about her as if she were a woman in a class apart, an almost supernatural creature, when he was a man who appreciated the realities of life, sometimes even a little too much ... ”

This time she smiled openly.

“One day, a long time ago, when I went to see him about something or other, I forget what, I had a job to escape from his clutches. He was a cool customer, and no mistake. In his eyes, it was perfectly normal ... ”

“Did your husband find out?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Of course not.”

“He was jealous?”

“In his fashion. We didn’t often have intercourse, and it was always cold, almost mechanical. What he would have condemned wasn’t that I should be attracted by another man but that I should be guilty of a misdemeanour, a sin, an act of treachery, something he regarded as unclean. Forgive me if I’ve talked too much or if I’ve given the impression of wanting to do him down, because that isn’t the case. You’ve seen that I

haven't made myself out to be better than I am. I shan't go on feeling a real woman much longer, and I'm making the most of it while I can ... ”

She had a sensual mouth and sparkling eyes. For several minutes she had kept crossing and uncrossing her legs.

“You are sure you won't have something to drink?”

“No thank you. It's time I was going.”

“I assume all this remains confidential?”

He smiled at her and made for the door, where she gave him a hot, plump hand.

“I must carry on with my daughter's dress,” she said, almost regretfully.

So he had managed, after all, to escape for a moment from the circle of old people. Leaving the flat in the Rue de la Pompe, it was without any feeling of surprise that he found himself back in the street, among all its noises and smells.

He found a taxi straight away and told the driver to take him to the Rue Saint-Dominique. Before going into the block of flats, he decided after all to go and have the glass of beer which he had refused at Madame Mazon's, and in the bar he rubbed shoulders with chauffeurs from the ministries and great houses.

The reporter was still at his post.

“You can see that I didn't try to follow you. You can't tell me whom you've been to see?”

“The solicitor.”

“Did he tell you anything new?”

“Not a thing.”

“Still no clues?”

“No.”

“And it isn't a political affair?”

“Apparently not.”

The uniformed policeman was there too. Maigret rang the bell, next to the lift-shaft. It was Janvier, in his shirt-sleeves, who opened the door to him, and Jaquette was not in the study.

“What have you done with her? Have you let her go out?”

“No. She tried to, after the phone call, saying that there was nothing left to eat in the house.”

“Where is she?”

“In her room. She’s resting.”

“What phone call are you talking about?”

“Half an hour after you had gone, the phone rang, and I answered it. I heard a woman’s voice, a rather quiet voice, at the other end of the line.”

“Who is that?” she asked.

“Instead of answering, I asked in my turn:

“ ‘Who is calling?’

“ ‘I should like to speak to Mademoiselle Larrieu.’

“ ‘Who shall I say?’

“There was a silence, then:

“ ‘The Princesse de V— .’

“All this time, Jaquette had been looking at me as if she knew what it was all about.

“ ‘Here she is.’

“I gave her the receiver and straight away she said:

“ ‘It’s me, Madame la Princesse ... Yes ... I would have come along, but these gentlemen won’t allow me to go out ... There were lots of them all over the flat, with all sorts of apparatus ... They spent hours asking me questions and even now there’s an inspector listening to me ... ’ ”

Janvier added:

“She looked as if she were defying me. After that, she listened most of the time.

“ ‘Yes ... Yes, Madame la Princesse ... Yes ... I understand ... I don’t know ... No ... Yes ... I’ll try ... I should like to as well ... Thank you, Madame la Princesse ... ’ ”

“What did she say then?”

“Nothing. She went back to her chair. After a quarter of an hour of silence, she muttered sadly:

“ ‘I suppose you aren’t going to let me get out? Even if there’s nothing left to eat in the house and I have to go without my dinner?’

“ ‘We’ll see about that later on.’

“ ‘In that case, I don’t see what we are doing sitting face to face like this, and I’d rather go and have a rest. Have I got your permission to do that?’

“Since then she has been in her room. She has locked the door.”

“Nobody has been?”

“No. There have been a few phone calls, from an American news agency and some provincial papers ... ”

“You didn’t manage to get anything out of Jaquette?”

“I started asking her the most innocent questions imaginable, in the hope of winning her confidence. All that happened was that she said in a sarcastic voice:

“ ‘Young man, you can’t teach your grandmother to suck eggs. If your chief thought I was going to tell you some secrets ... ’ ”

“The Quai didn’t ring at all?”

“No. Just the examining magistrate.”

“Does he want to see me?”

“He asked if you would call him if you had any news. Alain Mazon has been to see him.”

“And you didn’t tell me?”

“I was keeping it till the end. Apparently the nephew went to see him to complain that you had read Saint-Hilaire’s private correspondence without his permission. As executor, he asked for seals to be affixed to the flat until the will had been read.”

“What did the magistrate say to him?”

“He told him to come and see you.”

“And Mazeron hasn’t been back?”

“No. He may be on the way, because it isn’t long since I had that phone call. Do you think he’ll come?”

Maigret hesitated, and finally pulled a telephone directory towards him. After finding what he was looking for, standing there with a serious, preoccupied expression on his face, he dialled a number.

“Hullo. Is that the V— residence? I should like to speak to the Princesse de V—. This is Chief-Inspector Maigret of the Judicial Police speaking ... Yes, I’ll hold the line ... ”

There was as it were a different kind of silence in the room, and Janvier held his breath as he looked at his chief. Several minutes went by.

“Yes, I’ll wait ... Thank you ... Hullo ... Yes, Madame, this is Chief-Inspector Maigret ... ”

It was not his everyday voice, and he felt a certain emotion as when, in his childhood, he had occasion to speak to the Comtesse de Saint-Fiacre.

“I thought that you might possibly wish me to get in touch with you, if only to give you a few details ... Yes ... Yes ... When you wish ... I will come to the Rue de Varenne then an hour from now ... ”

The two men looked at each other in silence. Finally Maigret heaved a sigh.

“You had better stay here,” he said in the end. “Ring up Lucas and ask him to send you somebody, preferably Lapointe. The old girl can go out whenever she likes and one of the two of you will follow her.”

He had an hour to wait. To while away the time, he took a bundle of letters out of the bookcase with the green curtain.

“Yesterday, at Longchamp, I caught sight of you in a morning coat, and you know how I like to see you dressed like that. You had a pretty redhead on your arm who ... ”



MAIGRET did not expect to find a house that still smelt of the funeral, as in lower-class or even middle-class homes, with the scent of tapers and chrysanthemums, a red-eyed widow, and relatives from distant parts, dressed in deep mourning, sitting around eating and drinking. On account of his country childhood, the smell of alcohol, and especially that of marc-brandy, remained associated for him with death and funerals.

“Drink this, Catherine,” they used to say to the widow before setting off for the church and the cemetery. “You need something to buck you up.”

She would drink up, weeping at the same time. The men used to drink at the local inn, and when they returned home.

If hangings decorated with silver tears had adorned the main entrance in the morning, they had been removed a long time ago and the courtyard had resumed its normal appearance, half in the shade, half in the sun, with a uniformed chauffeur washing a long black limousine, and three cars, including a yellow sports car, waiting at the foot of the steps.

It was as huge as the Elysée and Maigret remembered that the house had often served as the setting for balls and charity bazaars.

At the top of the steps, he pushed open a glass door and found himself all alone in an entrance-hall paved with marble. Double doors standing open on his left and right afforded him a glimpse of the state rooms in which various objects, no doubt the old coins and snuffboxes which had been mentioned to him, were displayed as in a museum.

Should he make for one of those doors, or go up the double flight of stairs leading to the first floor? He was hesitating when a major-domo, appearing from heaven knows where, came up to him in silence, took his hat out of his hands, and without asking for his name murmured:

“This way.”

Maigret followed his guide up the staircase, across another drawing-room on the first floor, and then through a long room which was obviously a picture-gallery.

He was not kept waiting. The servant opened a door a little way, and announced in a soft voice:

“Chief-Inspector Maigret.”

The boudoir which he entered did not look out on to the courtyard but on to a garden, and the foliage of the trees, full of birds, brushed against the two open windows.

Somebody got up from an arm-chair and for a moment he failed to realize that it was the woman he had come to see, the Princess Isabelle. His surprise must have been obvious for as she came towards him she said:

“You expected me to look rather different, didn’t you?”

He did not dare to say yes. He made no reply, taken aback by her appearance. In the first place, for all that she was dressed in black, she did not give the impression of being in deep mourning, though he would have been hard put to it to say why. She did not appear to be greatly distressed.

She was smaller than in the photographs, but, unlike Jaquette for instance, she was not bent under the weight of the years. He had no time to analyse his impressions. He would do that later. For the moment, he registered mechanically.

What surprised him most of all was finding a plump woman, with full, smooth cheeks and a dumpy body. Her hips, scarcely hinted at by the princess dress in the photograph in Saint-Hilaire’s room, had become as broad as those of any farmer’s wife.

Was the boudoir in which they were standing the room where she spent most of her life? There were old tapestries on the walls. The floor shone brightly and every piece of furniture was in its place, something which, for no particular reason, reminded Maigret of the convent where, in the past, he had sometimes visited an aunt of his who was a nun.

“Please take a seat.”

She pointed to a gilded arm-chair to which he preferred an upright chair, even though he was afraid of breaking its delicate legs.

“My first impulse was to go over there,” she confided to him, sitting down in her turn, “but then I realized that he wouldn’t be there any more. The body has been taken to the Morgue, I suppose?”

She was not afraid of words, nor of the pictures which they evoked. Her face was serene, almost joyful, and that too recalled the convent, the peculiar serenity of the good nuns who never really looked as if they belonged to this world.

“I badly want to see him one last time. I shall come back to that later. What I want to know first of all is whether he died in pain.”

“You can set your mind at rest, Madame. The Comte de Saint-Hilaire was killed instantly.”

“He was in his study?”

“Yes.”

“Sitting?”

“Yes. It seems that he was busy correcting proofs.”

She closed her eyes, as if to give the picture time to take shape in her mind, and Maigret made so bold as to ask a question in his turn.

“Have you ever been to the Rue Saint-Dominique?”

“Only once, a long time ago, with Jaquette’s connivance. I had chosen a time when I was sure that he wouldn’t be there. I wanted to see the setting of his life, so as to be able to visualize him at home, in the various rooms.”

An idea struck her.

“You mean you haven’t read the letters?”

He hesitated, then decided to tell the truth.

“I’ve looked through them. Not all of them though ... ”

“Are they still in the Empire bookcase with the gilt lattice-work?”

He nodded.

“I thought that you would have read them. I don’t hold it against you. I realize that it was your duty.”

“How did you hear about his death?”

“From my daughter-in-law. My son Philippe had come from Normandy with his wife and children to attend the funeral. A little while ago, after we had got back from the cemetery, my daughter-in-law happened to glance at one of the newspapers that the servants usually put out on a table in the hall.”

“Your daughter-in-law knows all about it?”

She looked at him with an astonishment which bordered on innocence. If he had not known who she was, he might well have thought that she was playing a part.

“All about what?”

“About your relationship with the Comte de Saint-Hilaire.”

Her smile too was a nun’s smile.

“But of course. How could she have failed to know about it? We never made any attempt at concealment. There was nothing wrong about it. Armand was a very dear friend ... ”

“Did your son know him?”

“My son too knew all about it, and when he was a boy I sometimes pointed out Armand to him from a distance. I think the first time was at Auteuil ... ”

“He never went to see him?”

She replied, not without a certain logic, her own logic if nothing else: ”

“Whatever for?”

The birds went on twittering in the foliage and a pleasantly cool breeze came in from the garden.

“Won’t you have a cup of tea?”

Alain Mazeron's wife, in the Rue de la Pompe, had offered him some beer. Here it was tea.

"No thank you."

"Tell me all that you have discovered, Monsieur Maigret. You see, for fifty years, I have been accustomed to living in imagination with him. I knew what he was doing at every hour of the day. I visited the cities where he was living, when he was still an ambassador, and I arranged things with Jaquette so as to have a look inside all his successive houses. At what time was he killed?"

"As far as we can tell, between eleven o'clock and midnight."

"Yet he wasn't ready to go to bed."

"How do you know?"

"Because before going to his room he always wrote me a few words which finished his daily letter. He began it every morning with a ritual phrase:

" '*Good morning, Isi ...* '

"Just as he would have greeted me if fate had allowed us to live together. He would add a few lines and then, during the day, he would come back to the letter to tell me what he had been doing. At night, his last words were invariably:

" '*Good night, pretty Isi ...* ' "

She gave an embarrassed smile.

"I must apologize for telling you something that probably makes you laugh. For him, I had remained the Isabelle of twenty."

"He had seen you since."

"Yes, from a distance. Consequently he knew that I had become an old woman, but for him the present was not as real as the past. Can you understand that? In the same way, he hadn't changed for me. But now tell me what happened. Tell me everything, without trying to spare my feelings. When a

woman gets to my age, you know, it means that she is no weakling. Who was the murderer? How did he get in?"

"Somebody got in all right, seeing that no weapon has been found in the room or in the flat. As Jaquette maintained that she locked the door about nine o'clock as she does every night, bolting it and putting the chain on too, we are forced to conclude that the Comte de Saint-Hilaire let in his visitor himself. Do you know if he often received people in the evening?"

"Never. Since his retirement he had become very much a man of habit and he had adopted a daily routine that was practically invariable. I could show you the letters he wrote to me in the last few years ... You would see that the first sentence is often:

" 'Good morning, Isi ... I send my usual morning greeting, since a new day is beginning, while I, for my part, am beginning my monotonous circus routine ... ' "

"That was what he called his carefully planned days, in which there was no room for the unexpected ...

"Unless I receive a letter by this evening's post ... But of course not! It was Jaquette who posted them, in the morning, on her way to buy croissants. If she had posted one this morning, she would have told me on the telephone ... "

"What do you think of her?"

"She was absolutely devoted to us, to Armand and me. When he broke his arm, in Switzerland, it was she who wrote to me at his dictation, and when, later on, he underwent an operation, she sent me a letter every day giving me the latest news."

"You don't think she was jealous?"

She smiled again and Maigret found it hard to get used to it. This calm and serenity surprised him, for he had been expecting a more or less dramatic interview.

It was as if death, here, did not have the same meaning as it did elsewhere, as if Isabelle were living quite naturally with it, without fear, regarding it as part of the normal course of life.

“She was jealous, but as a dog is jealous of its master.”

He hesitated to ask certain questions, to broach certain subjects, and it was she who introduced them with a disarming simplicity.

“If, in the old days, she sometimes happened to be jealous in another way, as a woman, it was of his mistresses, not of me.”

“Do you think she was his mistress once?”

“There can be no doubt about that.”

“He told you so in a letter?”

“He never concealed anything from me, even the humiliating things which men hesitate to tell their wives. For instance, he wrote to me, not so many years ago :

“ ‘*Jaquette is nervy today. I must remember to pleasure her tonight.*’

She seemed to be amused at Maigret’s astonishment.

“Does it surprise you? Yet it’s so natural.”

“You weren’t jealous either?”

“Not of that. My only fear was that he might meet a woman capable of taking my place in his mind. Go on with what you were telling me, Chief-Inspector. You don’t know anything about his visitor?”

“Only that he fired a first shot with a heavy-calibre weapon, probably a .301 automatic.”

“Where was Armand hit?”

“In the head. The medical expert says that death was instantaneous. The body slipped down on to the carpet, at the foot of the arm-chair. Then the murderer fired three more shots.”

“Why, since he was dead?”

“We don’t know. Did the killer get into a panic? Was he in such a state of fury that he lost his self-control? It’s difficult to answer that question as yet. At the Assizes, a murderer who has attacked his victim again and again, stabbing him for

instance a good many times, is often accused of cruelty. Well, judging by my experience and that of my colleagues, it is nearly always timid characters—I hesitate to say sensitive types—who behave like that. They are panic-stricken, don't want to see their victims suffer, and lose their heads ... ”

“You think that that is what happened here?”

“Unless it is a case of revenge, of hatred held in check for a long time, something which is much rarer.”

He was beginning to feel at ease with this old woman who could say anything and hear anything.

“What would seem to contradict this theory is that the murderer, afterwards, had the presence of mind to pick up all the cartridge-cases. They must have been scattered all over the room, quite a way from the body. But he didn't miss a single one, nor did he leave any fingerprints. There remains one last question which puzzles me, especially after what you have just told me about your relations with Jaquette. After she had found the body, this morning, she doesn't seem to have thought of ringing you up and instead she went, not to the local police-station, but to the Foreign Office.”

“I think I can give you an explanation of that. Just after my husband's death, the telephone kept ringing nearly all the time. People we hardly knew wanted information about the funeral arrangements, or wanted to express their sympathy to me. My son decided to cut the telephone off.”

“So that Jaquette may have tried to ring you up?”

“Very probably. And if she didn't come herself to give me the news, it must have been because she knew that she would find it difficult to see me on the day of the funeral.”

“You don't know any enemies the Comte de Saint-Hilaire had?”

“Not one.”

“In his letters to you, did he sometimes mention his nephew?”

“Have you seen Alain?”

“This morning.”

“What did he say?”

“Nothing. He has been to see Maître Aubonnet. The will is going to be read tomorrow, and the solicitor will be getting in touch with you as your presence is necessary.”

“I know.”

“You know the terms of the will?”

“Armand insisted on leaving me his furniture, so that, if he happened to die before me, I should still have the impression to some extent of having been his wife.”

“Are you going to accept this bequest?”

“It was his wish, wasn’t it? Mine too. If he hadn’t died, once I had come out of mourning I should have become the Comtesse de Saint-Hilaire. That had always been agreed between us.”

“Your husband knew about your plans?”

“Of course.”

“Your son and daughter-in-law too?”

“Not only them, but all our friends. We had nothing to hide, as I said before. Now, on account of the name which I still bear, I shall be obliged to go on living in this big house instead of going and settling down, as I had often dreamed of doing, in the Rue Saint-Dominique. Armand’s flat will be reconstructed here all the same. No doubt I haven’t a very long time to live, but however little time I have left, I shall live in his setting, you understand, as if I were his widow.”

Maigret was experiencing a phenomenon which annoyed him intensely. To begin with he was captivated by this woman who was so different from anything he had known before. Not only by her, but by the legend which she and Saint-Hilaire had created and in which they had lived.

At first sight, it was as absurd as a fairy-story or those edifying tales in religious story-books.

Here, in front of her, he found himself believing in it. He began to adopt their way of seeing and feeling, rather as in his aunt's convent he used to walk on tiptoe and speak in a whisper, full of unctuous piety.

Then, all of a sudden, he looked at the old lady in a different way, with the eyes of a man from the Quai des Orfèvres, and he was filled with revulsion.

Were they making fun of him? Were all these people—Jaquette, Alain Mazon, his wife in the tight-fitting trousers, Isabelle, and even the solicitor Aubonnet—in a conspiracy to fool him?

There was a dead man, a real corpse, with his skull shattered and his belly gaping open. That implied the existence of a murderer, and it could not have been any common criminal who had been able to gain entrance to the former ambassador's flat and kill him at point-blank range without his becoming suspicious and trying to defend himself.

Maigret had learnt, over the years, that people did not kill without a motive, without a serious motive. And even if, in this case, the killer was a madman or a madwoman, he or she was still a creature of flesh and blood, who lived in the victim's circle.

Was Jaquette, with her aggressive mistrust, mad? Was Mazon, whom his wife accused of mental cruelty, unbalanced? Or was it Isabelle who was not in her right mind?

Every time he started thinking along these lines, he got ready to change his attitude, to put some cruel questions, if only in order to dispel this infectious blandness.

And every time, a surprised or ingenuous or mischievous glance from the Princess disarmed him, made him feel ashamed of himself.

"In fact, you have no idea who could have benefited by killing Saint-Hilaire?"

"Benefited? Certainly not. You know as well as I do the broad lines of the will."

"And what if Alain Mazon needed money badly?"

“His uncle used to give him some whenever that was the case and in any event he would have left him his fortune.”

“Mazeron knew that?”

“I don’t doubt it. Once my husband died, Armand and I would have married, it is true, but I would never have allowed my family to inherit his money.”

“And Jaquette?”

“She was aware that provision had been made for her old age.”

“She was also aware that you intended to go and live in the Rue Saint-Dominique?”

“She looked forward to my doing so.”

Something in Maigret protested. This was all false, inhuman.

“And your son?”

Surprised by the question, she waited for him to explain what he meant, and as Maigret remained silent, she asked in her turn:

“What has my son got to do with it?”

“I don’t know. I’m just feeling my way. He is the heir to the name.”

“He would have been even if Armand had gone on living.”

Obviously. But might he not have considered it demeaning for his mother to marry Saint-Hilaire?

“Was your son here last night?”

“No. He is staying with his wife and children at a hotel in the Place Vendôme where they are in the habit of residing when they come to Paris.”

Maigret frowned, looking at the walls as if, through them, he were gauging the size of the Rue de Varenne house. Surely it contained a goodly number of empty rooms, of unoccupied suites?

“You mean to say that since his marriage he has never stayed in this house?”

“In the first place, he very rarely comes to Paris, and never for long, because he hates society life.”

“His wife too?”

“Yes. In the first years of their marriage they had a suite of rooms in the house. Then they had a first child, a second, a third ... ”

“How many have they altogether?”

“Six. The eldest is twenty, the youngest seven. What I am going to say may shock you, but I cannot live with children. It’s a mistake to think that all women are born to be mothers. I had Philippe because it was my duty to have him. I looked after him as much as I was expected to look after him. But it would have been too much for me to bear, years later, to have children shouting and galloping all over the house. My son knows that. So does his wife.”

“They don’t hold it against you?”

“They accept me as I am, with all my faults and vagaries.”

“Were you alone here last night?”

“With the servants and two nuns who were watching in the mortuary chapel. The Abbé Gauge, who is my confessor and also an old friend of mine, stayed until ten o’clock.”

“You said a little while ago that your son and his family were here in the house.”

“They are waiting to say goodbye to me, at least my daughter-in-law and the children are. You must have seen their car in the courtyard. They are going back to Normandy, except for my son who has to accompany me to the solicitor’s tomorrow.”

“Will you allow me to have a few words with your son?”

“Why not? I was expecting you to make that request. I even thought that you would like to see the whole family and that is why I asked my daughter-in-law to postpone her departure.”

Was this naivety on her part? Or was it defiance? To come back to the English doctor's theory, would a schoolmaster have found it easier to discover the truth than Maigret?

He felt more humble and helpless than ever in front of these human beings on whom he was trying to pass judgment.

"Come this way."

She led him across the gallery, stopping for a moment with her hand on the handle of a door behind which he could hear the sound of voices.

She opened the door and said simply:

"Chief-Inspector Maigret ... "

And in a huge room, the chief-inspector noticed first of all a child eating a cake, then a girl of about ten who was asking her mother something in a whisper.

The latter was a tall fair-haired woman of about forty. With her florid pink complexion, she reminded him of one of those stout Dutchwomen you see in coloured prints and post-cards.

A boy of thirteen was looking out of the window. The Princess introduced everybody and Maigret registered the pictures one by one, planning to put them together again later like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

"Frederick, the eldest ... "

A lanky young man, fair-haired like his mother, bowed slightly without holding out his hand.

"He intends to enter the diplomatic service too."

There was another girl, of fifteen, and a boy of twelve or thirteen.

"Isn't Philippe here?"

"He has gone down to see if the car is ready."

One had the impression that life had been suspended, as in a station waiting-room.

"Come this way, Monsieur Maigret."

They went along another corridor at the end of which they met a tall man who watched them coming towards him with a slightly annoyed expression.

“I was looking for you, Philippe. Chief-Inspector Maigret would like to have a few words with you. Where will you see him?”

Philippe held out his hand, looking a little vague perhaps, but fairly curious to see a detective at close quarters.

“Oh, it doesn’t matter where. Here will do.”

He pushed open a door leading into a study papered in red with ancestral portraits on the walls.

“I will leave you now, Monsieur Maigret, but please don’t leave me without news. As soon as the body is brought back to the Rue Saint-Dominique, be good enough to let me know.”

She disappeared, light and unsubstantial.

“You want to talk to me?”

Whose study was it? Probably nobody’s, because there was nothing in it to indicate that anybody had ever worked here. Philippe de V— pointed to a chair and held out his cigarette-case.

“No thank you.”

“You don’t smoke?”

“Just a pipe.”

“So do I, usually. But not in this house. My mother hates it.”

In his voice there was a sort of irritation, perhaps even impatience.

“I suppose you want to talk to me about Saint-Hilaire?”

“You know that he was murdered last night.”

“My mother told me a little while ago. It’s a curious coincidence, you must admit.”

“You mean that his death might be connected with your father’s death?”

“I don’t know. The paper doesn’t say anything about the circumstances of the crime. I suppose that suicide is out of the question?”

“Why do you ask? Had the Count any reason to commit suicide?”

“I can’t think of any, but then you never know what’s going on in people’s heads.”

“Did you know him?”

“My mother pointed him out to me when I was a child. Later on I came across him now and then.”

“Did you speak to him?”

“Never.”

“Did you bear him a grudge?”

“Whatever for?”

He too seemed genuinely surprised at the questions he was asked. He too gave the impression of being a decent fellow who had nothing to hide.

“All her life my mother kept up a sort of mystic love for him of which we had no reason to feel ashamed. Indeed, my father was the first to smile at it with a certain affectionate amusement.”

“When did you arrive from Normandy?”

“On Sunday afternoon. I had come by myself, last week, after my father’s accident, but then I had gone back home because he didn’t seem to be in danger. I was surprised on Sunday when my mother rang me up to tell me that he had succumbed to an attack of uraemia.”

“You came along with your family?”

“No. My wife and children didn’t arrive until Monday. Except for my eldest son, of course, who is a boarder at the Ecole Normale.”

“Did your mother speak to you about Saint-Hilaire?”

“What do you mean?”

“Perhaps this is a stupid question. Did she tell you, at a given moment, that now she would be able to marry the Count?”

“She didn’t need to speak to me about that. I had known for a long time that if my father died before her, that marriage would take place.”

“You have never shared in your father’s social life?”

Everything seemed to surprise him and he thought carefully before replying.

“I think I can understand your point of view. You have seen photographs of my father and mother in the illustrated magazines, either when they visited some foreign court or when they attended a big wedding or a society engagement-party. I myself attended some of those events, of course, when I was between eighteen and twenty-five. When I say twenty-five, I’m speaking vaguely. After that, I married and went to live in the country. Did they tell you that I had been to the agricultural school at Grignon? My father gave me one of his estates in Normandy and I live with my family. Is that what you wanted to know?”

“You haven’t any suspicions?”

“As to Saint-Hilaire’s murderer, you mean?”

It seemed to Maigret that the other man’s lower lip had quivered slightly, but he would not have dared to take his oath on it.

“No. You couldn’t call it a suspicion.”

“An idea has occurred to you all the same?”

“It’s quite preposterous and I’d rather not talk about it.”

“You’ve thought of somebody whose life was going to be changed by your father’s death?”

Philippe de V— raised his eyes which he had lowered for a moment.

“Let us say that something of the sort entered my head but I didn’t dwell on it. I’ve heard so much about Jaquette and her

devoted loyalty ... ”

He seemed displeased at the turn the conversation had taken.

“I don’t want to hustle you. But I have to say goodbye to my family and I should like them to get home before dark.”

“Are you staying a few days in Paris?”

“Until tomorrow evening.”

“In the Place Vendôme?”

“My mother told you?”

“Yes. As a matter of form, I must ask you one last question, which I hope you won’t take amiss. I have had to put it to your mother too.”

“Where I was last night, I suppose. At what time?”

“Let us say between ten o’clock and midnight.”

“That’s quite a long stretch. Wait a moment. I dined here with my mother.”

“Alone with her?”

“Yes. I left at about half past nine when the Abbé Gauge arrived, because I have no great liking for the man. I went back to the hotel to say goodnight to my wife and the children.”

There was a silence. Philippe de V— looked straight in front of him, hesitant and embarrassed.

“Then I went for a stroll along the Champs-Élysées ... ”

“Until midnight?”

“No.”

This time, he looked Maigret in the face, with a rather sheepish smile.

“This may strike you as peculiar, in view of my recent bereavement. It happens to be a sort of tradition with me. At Genestoux, I am too well known to be able to indulge in any sort of affair, and the idea has never entered my head. It may

have something to do with my youthful memories. In any case, whenever I come to Paris, I am in the habit of spending an hour or two with a pretty woman. As I don't want to have any consequences or to complicate my life, I content myself with ... ”

He made a vague gesture.

“On the Champs-Élysées?” asked Maigret.

“I wouldn't say this in front of my wife, who wouldn't understand. In her opinion, outside a certain society ... ”

“What is your wife's maiden name?”

“Irène de Marchangy ... I can give you a few details about my companion yesterday, if they are of any use to you. She's a brunette, not very tall; she was wearing a pale green dress; and she has a beauty-spot under one breast. I think it's the left breast, but I can't be sure.”

“You went to her home?”

“I suppose that she lives in the Rue de Berry hotel where she took me, because there were some clothes in the wardrobe and personal belongings in the bathroom.”

Maigret smiled.

“Forgive my insistence and thank you for being so patient.”

“Your mind's easy as far as I'm concerned? This way ... I'll leave you to go down by yourself, because I'm in a hurry to ... ”

He looked at his watch, held out his hand.

“The best of luck!”

In the courtyard, a chauffeur was waiting beside a limousine whose engine was running with a gentle hum which was scarcely perceptible.

Five minutes later, Maigret literally plunged into the fuggy atmosphere of a café and ordered a beer.



HE was awakened by the sunshine coming in through the slats of the Venetian shutter, and, with a gesture which, after so many years, had become automatic, he put his hand out towards his wife's place. The sheets were still warm. From the kitchen, at the same time as the smell of freshly ground coffee, there came a gentle whistling sound, that of the water singing in the kettle.

Here too, as in the aristocratic Rue de Varenne, there were birds chirping in the trees, though not so close to the windows, and Maigret had a feeling of physical well-being with which, however, was mingled something unpleasant and still rather vague.

He had had a restless night. He remembered having a number of dreams and even, once at least, waking up with a start.

Hadn't his wife, at one moment, spoken quietly to him and handed him a glass of water?

It was hard to remember. There were several stories tangled up together and he kept losing the thread. They had one thing in common: in all of them he played a humiliating part.

One picture returned to his mind, clearer than the rest, the picture of a place which resembled the V— house, but which was bigger and less luxurious. It had something about it of a convent or a ministry, with endless corridors and an infinite number of doors.

What he was doing there was not very clear in his mind. He knew only that he had a task to perform and that it was of capital importance. The trouble was that he could find nobody to guide him. Pardon had told him that this would be the case when he had taken leave of him in the street. He could not see Doctor Pardon in his dream, nor the street. He was nonetheless certain that his friend had warned him what to expect.

The fact of the matter was that he was not entitled to ask his way. He had tried, at the beginning, before it had been borne in

on him that it was not done. The old people just looked at him, smiling and shaking their heads.

For there were old people everywhere. Perhaps it was an almshouse or a home for the aged, although it did not give him that impression.

He recognized Saint-Hilaire, an erect figure with a pink face beneath his silky white hair. An extremely good-looking man, who obviously knew it and seemed to be laughing at the chief-inspector. Maître Aubonnet was sitting in a bathchair with rubber wheels and was amusing himself by driving very fast up and down a gallery.

There were many others, including the Prince de V— who, with one hand on Isabelle's shoulder, was indulgently watching Maigret's efforts.

The chief-inspector was in a delicate situation, because he had not been initiated yet and nobody would tell him what tests he still had to undergo.

He was in the position of a raw recruit in the army, of a new boy at school. The others kept playing tricks on him. For instance, every time he pushed open a door, it closed again by itself, or else, instead of opening into a bedroom or a drawing-room, it led into another corridor.

Only the old Comtesse de Saint-Fiacre was prepared to help him. Not having the right to speak, she tried to make him understand by means of gestures what was wrong. For instance she pointed to his knees and, looking down, Maigret saw that he was wearing short trousers.

Madame Maigret, in the kitchen, was at last pouring the water on to the coffee. Maigret opened his eyes, annoyed at the memory of this stupid dream. The long and short of it was that he had as it were offered himself as a candidate for a club which, in this case, was a club of old people. And if they had refused to take him seriously, it was because they regarded him as a little boy.

Even sitting on the edge of his bed, he was still annoyed, gazing vaguely at his wife who, after putting a cup of coffee

on the bedside table, was opening the shutters.

“You shouldn’t have eaten those snails last night ... ”

To cheer himself up after a disappointing day, he had taken her out to dinner and he had eaten some snails.

“How do you feel?”

“All right.”

He was not going to let himself be impressed by a dream. He drank his coffee and went into the dining-room, where he glanced at the newspaper while he was having his breakfast.

They gave a few more details than the day before about Armand de Saint-Hilaire’s death, and they had found quite a good photograph of him. There was one of Jaquette too, surprised just as she was going into a dairy shop. It had been taken the day before, in the late afternoon, when she had gone to do her shopping with Lapointe on her heels.

“At the Quai d’Orsay, the theory of a political crime is completely ruled out. On the other hand, in informed circles, the Count’s death is being linked with another death, of an accidental nature, which occurred three days ago.”

That meant that in the next edition or so, the story of Saint-Hilaire and Isabelle would be recounted at full length.

Maigret still felt dull and obtuse, and it was at moments such as this that he wished he had chosen a different profession.

He waited for a bus in the Place Voltaire, and he was lucky enough to get one with a platform on which he could smoke his pipe while he watched the streets go by. At the Quai des Orfèvres, he greeted the policeman on duty outside with a wave of the hand and climbed the stairs which a charwoman was sweeping after sprinkling them with water to keep down the dust.

On his desk he found a whole pile of documents, reports and photographs.

The photographs of the dead man were impressive. Some of them showed the whole body, just as it had been found, with

one leg of the desk in the foreground and the stains on the carpet. There were others too of the head, the chest and the stomach, taken while the body was still fully clothed.

Other numbered photographs showed the hole made by each bullet on entering the body, and a dark swelling under the skin, on the back, where one of the bullets, after breaking the collar-bone, had come to a stop.

There was a knock at the door and Lucas appeared, looking as fresh as a daisy, close-shaved, with some talcum powder below one ear.

“Dupeu is here, Chief.”

“Send him in.”

Inspector Dupeu, just like Isabelle’s son, had a large family, six or seven children, but it was not out of irony that Maigret had given him a certain task to perform the day before. He had simply happened to be available at the time.

“Well?”

“What the Prince told you was true. I went to the Rue de Berry about ten o’clock. As usual, there were four or five of them walking up and down. There was only one little brunette among them, and she told me she hadn’t been there the night before because she had been to see her baby in the country. I waited quite a while and then I saw another one come out of a hotel with an American soldier.

“ ‘Why are you asking me that?’ she said in a worried way when I put my question to her.

“ ‘Is he wanted by the police?’

“ ‘No. It’s just a check-up.’

“ ‘A big chap, about fifty years old, and rather stout?’ ”

Dupeu went on:

“I asked the girl if she had a beauty spot under one breast and she said yes, and that she had another one on the hip. Naturally the man didn’t tell her his name, but he was the only

one she picked up the night before last, because he paid her three times as much as she usually asks.

“ ‘Yet he didn’t even stay half-an-hour ... ’

“What time did he accost you?”

“ ‘At ten to eleven. I remember that because I was coming out of the bar next door where I’d been for a coffee and I looked at the clock behind the counter.’ ”

Maigret remarked:

“If he spent only half-an-hour with her, he must have left her before half past eleven?”

“That’s what she told me.”

Isabella’s son had not been lying. Nobody in this case seemed to be lying. It was true that, leaving the Rue de Berry at half past eleven, he could quite easily have got to the Rue Saint-Dominique before midnight.

Why should he have gone to see his mother’s old sweetheart? And above all, why should he have killed him?

The chief-inspector had had no better luck with the nephew, Alain Mazon. The day before, when Maigret had gone along the Rue Jacob just before dinner-time, he had found nobody there. He had telephoned later at about eight o’clock without getting a reply.

He had then told Lucas to send somebody to the antique-dealer’s early in the morning. It was Bonfils who in his turn came into the office with some equally disappointing information.

“He wasn’t in the least upset by my questions.”

“His shop was open?”

“No. I had to ring the bell. He looked out of the first-floor window before coming down in his braces, unshaven. I asked him for an account of his movements yesterday afternoon and evening. He told me that to begin with he had gone to see the solicitor.”

“That’s true.”

“I don’t doubt it. After that he went to the Rue Drouot, where there was an auction-sale of helmets, uniform buttons and weapons of the Napoleonic period. He says that there’s tremendous competition for these relics between certain collectors. He bought one lot, and showed me a pink form with a list of the things which he has to go and collect this morning.”

“After that?”

“He went and had dinner in a restaurant in the Rue de Seine where he nearly always has his meals. I checked up on that.”

Another one who had not been lying! It was a queer profession, thought Maigret, in which you felt disappointed that somebody hadn’t committed murder! Yet this was the case here, and the chief-inspector, despite himself, felt a grudge against each of these people in turn for being innocent or appearing so.

For the fact remained that there was a corpse.

He picked up his telephone.

“Will you come downstairs, Moers?”

He didn’t believe in the perfect crime. In twenty-five years of detective work, he hadn’t come across a single one. True, he could think of a few crimes which had gone unpunished. Often the police knew the identity of the criminal, who had had time to escape abroad. Or else they were crimes of violence or poisoning.

This was not the case here. No ordinary criminal would have entered the Rue Saint-Dominique flat and fired four shots at an old man sitting at his desk only to go away without taking anything.

“Come in, Moers. Sit down.”

“You’ve read my report?”

“Not yet.”

Maigret did not confess that he had not had the courage to read it, any more than the eighteen-page report from the medical expert. The day before, he had left Moers and his men

to look for material clues, and he put his trust in them, knowing that nothing would escape their notice.

“Has Gastine-Renette sent in his conclusions?”

“They are in the file. The weapon involved is a .301 automatic, either a Browning or one of the many imitations that are to be found on the market.”

“You are sure that not a single cartridge-case was left in the flat?”

“My men searched every square inch.”

“No weapon either?”

“No weapons or ammunition, except for some fowling-pieces and the cartridges to go with them.”

“Any fingerprints?”

“Those of the old woman, the Count and the concierge’s wife. I had taken their fingerprints on the off-chance before leaving the Rue Saint-Dominique. The concierge’s wife came twice a week to help Jaquette Larrieu with the heavy work.”

Moers too seemed perplexed and annoyed.

“I’ve added an inventory of everything we found in the furniture and the cupboards. But I’ve spent a good part of the night going through it without spotting anything suspicious or unexpected.”

“Any money?”

“A few thousand francs in a wallet, some change in a drawer in the kitchen, and in the desk some Rothschild’s Bank cheque-books.”

“Any stubs?”

“Some cheque-stubs too. The poor old chap had so little idea that he was going to die that he ordered a suit ten days ago from a tailor on the Boulevard Haussmann.”

“No marks on the window-sill?”

“None whatever.”

They looked at one another and understood one another. They had worked together for years and they could scarcely remember a single case in which, going over the scene of the crime with a fine-tooth comb, as the papers say, they had not discovered a few more or less suspicious details, at least at first sight.

Here, it was all too perfect. Everything had a logical explanation except, of course, the old man's death.

By wiping the grip of the pistol and putting it in Saint-Hilaire's hand, the murderer could have given the impression of a case of suicide. Provided, of course, that he had stopped after the first bullet. But why had he fired the other three?

And why couldn't they find the former ambassador's automatic? Old Jaquette admitted having seen it, only a few months before, in the chest of drawers in the bedroom.

The gun was no longer in the flat and, according to the servant's description, it had roughly the same size and weight as a .301 automatic.

Supposing the former ambassador had let somebody into the flat ... Somebody he knew, since he had sat down again at his desk, in his dressing-gown ...

In front of him, a bottle of brandy and a glass ... Why hadn't he offered his visitor a drink?

Maigret tried to imagine the scene. This visitor going to the bedroom—along the corridor or by way of the dining-room—taking the pistol, coming back to the study, going up to the Count and firing the first shot at point-blank range ...

"It doesn't make sense," he sighed.

What is more, there had to be a motive, a motive strong enough for the person who had done this to run the risk of a death-sentence.

"I suppose you haven't submitted Jaquette to the paraffin test?"

"I wouldn't have dared to without asking you first."

When a firearm is discharged, especially an automatic, the explosion projects a certain distance characteristic particles which become engrained in the skin of the person who fires the gun, particularly along the edge of the hand, and remain for some time.

Maigret had thought of that, the day before. But had he any right to suspect the old servant more than anybody else?

Admittedly she was the best placed to commit the crime. She knew where to find the gun; she could come and go in the flat while her master was working, without arousing his suspicions, go up to him and fire; and it was quite likely that, with the body lying before her on the carpet, she would have gone on pulling the trigger.

She was sufficiently meticulous to have gone round the room afterwards picking up the cartridge-cases.

But was it likely that she would have gone calmly to bed afterwards, a few yards from her victim? Or that, in the morning, on her way to the Quai d'Orsay, she would have stopped somewhere, on the banks of the Seine, for instance, to get rid of the gun and the cartridge-cases?

She had a motive, or an apparent motive. For nearly fifty years, she had lived with Saint-Hilaire, in his shadow. He concealed nothing from her and, in all probability, they had at one time been on intimate terms.

The ambassador did not seem to have attached very much importance to this, nor did Isabelle, who referred to it with a smile.

But what about Jaquette? Wasn't she, to all intents and purposes, the old man's real companion?

She knew about his platonic love for the Princess, she posted his daily letters, and it was she too who had once admitted Isabelle to the flat in her master's absence.

"I wonder if ..."

The theory was distasteful to Maigret, who considered it too easy. Although he could conceive it, he couldn't *feel* it.

With the Prince de V— dead and Isabelle free, the old sweethearts were at last entitled to get married. They had only to wait until the end of the period of mourning to go through the marriage ceremony at town hall and church, and after that they would be able to live together in the Rue Saint-Dominique or the Rue de Varenne.

“Listen, Moers ... Go over there ... Be nice to Jaquette ... Don’t frighten her ... Tell her that it’s just a formality ... ”

“You want me to carry out the test?”

“It would relieve me of one worry ... ”

When he was told, a little later, that Monsieur Cromières was on the telephone, he sent word that he was out and that it wasn’t known when he would be back.

This morning, the Prince de V—’s will was going to be read. There, facing the old solicitor Aubonnet, there would be Isabelle and her son, and, later in the day, the Princess would return to the same room for the reading of another will.

The two men in her life, the same day ...

He telephoned to the Rue Saint-Dominique. He had hesitated, the day before, to affix seals on the study door and the bedroom door. He had preferred to wait, so that he could inspect the two rooms again.

Lapointe, whom he had left on duty, had obviously dropped off to sleep in an arm-chair.

“Is that you, Chief?”

“Nothing new?”

“Not a thing.”

“Where’s Jaquette?”

This morning, at six o’clock, when I was on duty in the study, I heard her dragging a vacuum cleaner along the corridor. I dashed out to ask her what she was going to do and she looked at me in astonishment.

“ ‘Clean the rooms, of course!’

“ ‘Clean what rooms?’

“ ‘First the bedroom, then the dining-room, then ... ’ ”

Maigret grunted:

“Did you let her?”

“No. She didn’t seem to understand why.

“ ‘What shall I do, then?’ she asked.”

“What did you reply?”

“I asked her to make me some coffee and she went out to buy me some croissants.”

“She didn’t stop anywhere on the way to make a phone call or post a letter?”

“No. I told the policeman on duty at the door to follow her at a distance. She really did just go to the baker’s and she only stayed there a minute.”

“Is she furious?”

“It’s hard to say. She comes and goes, moving her lips as if she were talking to herself. Just now, she’s in the kitchen and I don’t know what she’s doing.”

“There haven’t been any phone calls?”

The French window leading into the garden must have been open, for Maigret could hear the blackbirds singing over the telephone.

“Moers will be with you in a few minutes. He’s already on the way. You aren’t too tired?”

“I must admit that I’ve been asleep.”

“I’ll send somebody to relieve you a little later.”

An idea occurred to him.

“Don’t ring off. Go and ask Jaquette to show you her gloves.”

She was a devout person and he would have sworn that, for Sunday Mass, she wore a pair of gloves.

“I’ll hold the line.”

He waited with the receiver in his hand. It took quite a long time.

“Are you there, Chief?”

“Well?”

“She has shown me three pairs.”

“She wasn’t surprised?”

“She gave me a nasty look before going to open a drawer in her room. I caught sight of a missal, two or three rosaries, some postcards, medallions, handkerchiefs and gloves. Two pairs are in white cotton.”

Maigret could imagine her in summer, with white gloves and, no doubt, a touch of white in her hat.

“And the other pair?”

“In black kid, rather worn.”

“Good. See you later.”

Maigret’s question was connected with Moer’s errand. Saint-Hilaire’s murderer could have learnt from the newspapers and magazines that a person who fires a revolver has his hands encrusted with powder for some time after the shot. If Jaquette had used the automatic, mightn’t she have thought of putting on a pair of gloves? In that case, wouldn’t she have got rid of them?

To clear this point up, Maigret started searching through the file which was still spread out in front of him. He found the inventory, with the contents of every piece of furniture listed room by room.

Servant’s bedroom ... One iron bedstead ... One old mahogany table covered with a fringed tablecloth in crimson velvet ...

His finger followed the lines of typescript:

Eleven handkerchiefs, including six marked with the initial J ... Three pairs of gloves ...

She had shown the three pairs to Lapointe.

He went out, without taking his hat, and made for the door connecting Police Headquarters with the Palais de Justice. He had never been to see the examining magistrate, Urbain de Chézaud, who had previously been at Versailles and with whom he had never had occasion to work. He had to go up to the third floor, where the oldest offices were, and he finally found the magistrate's visiting-card on a door.

"Come in, Monsieur Maigret. I'm delighted to see you and I was wondering whether to ring you up."

He was about forty, with an intelligent air about him. On his desk, Maigret recognized the duplicate of the file which he had received himself and he noticed that certain pages had already been annotated in red pencil.

"We haven't many material clues, have we?" sighed the magistrate as he invited the chief-inspector to sit down. "I have just had a telephone call from the Quai d'Orsay ... "

"Young Monsieur Cromières ... "

"He says that he has tried unsuccessfully to get in touch with you and he wonders where this morning's papers obtained their information."

The magistrate's clerk, behind Maigret, was busy typing. The windows overlooked the courtyard so that there could never be any sunshine in the room.

"Have you any news?"

Because he liked the magistrate, Maigret made no attempt to conceal his discouragement.

"You've read that," he sighed, pointing to the file. "This evening or tomorrow I'll send you a preliminary report. Theft isn't the motive of the crime. It seems to me that it isn't a question of financial interest either, because it would be too obvious. The victim's nephew is the only person who benefits by Saint-Hilaire's death. And then he's gaining only a few months or a few years."

"Has he any pressing financial obligations?"

“Yes and no. It’s difficult to get anything positive out of these people without bluntly accusing them. And I haven’t any grounds for an accusation. Mazon lives apart from his wife and children. He has a secretive, rather unpleasant character, and his wife describes him as a sort of sadist.

“From the look of his antique shop, you would imagine that nobody ever goes into it. Admittedly he specializes in military trophies and there’s a small number of enthusiasts who are mad about that sort of thing.

“He has been known to ask his uncle for money. But there is no proof that the latter didn’t give it him with good grace.

“Was he afraid that once Saint-Hilaire had married he would lose the inheritance? That’s possible. But I don’t think so. Families like that have a mentality of their own. Every member regards himself as the trustee of property which it is his duty to hand on, more or less intact, to his direct or indirect descendants.”

He noticed a smile on the magistrate’s lips and remembered that the latter was called Urbain de Chézaud, a name with a particle.

“Go on.”

“I have been to see Madame Mazon, in her flat at Passy, and I can see no earthly reason why she should have gone and killed her husband’s uncle. The same goes for their two daughters. One of them, in any case, is in England. The other is working.”

Maigret filled his pipe.

“Do you mind if I smoke?”

“Of course not. I smoke a pipe too.”

It was the first time that he had ever met a pipe-smoking magistrate. It is true that the latter added:

“At home, in the evening, while I’m studying my files.”

“I have been to see the Princesse de V— .”

He glanced at the other man.

“You know about that business, I suppose?”

Maigret could have sworn that Urbain de Chézaud moved in circles where people were interested in Isabelle.

“I have heard about it.”

“Is it true that a lot of people knew about her liaison with the Count, if liaison is the right word?”

“In certain circles, yes. Her friends call her Isi.”

“That’s what the Count calls her too in his letters.”

“You have read them?”

“Not all of them. And not from beginning to end. There are enough to fill several volumes. It seemed to me, though it’s only an impression, that the Princess wasn’t as overwhelmed by the news of Saint-Hilaire’s death as one might have expected.”

“In my opinion, nothing in her life has ever succeeded in disturbing her composure. I have met her on occasion. I have heard about her from friends. One gets the impression that she has never passed a certain age and that time, for her, has come to a halt. Some say that she has remained as she was at twenty, others that she hasn’t changed since her schooldays in the convent.”

“The newspapers are going to publish her story. They’ve begun making references to it.”

“I’ve noticed that. It was bound to happen.”

“In the course of the conversation we had together, she didn’t say anything that gave me the slightest hint of a line to follow. This morning, she’s at the solicitor’s, for the reading of her husband’s will. She’ll be going back there this afternoon for Saint-Hilaire’s.”

“He has left her something?”

“Just his furniture and personal belongings.”

“Have you been to see her son?”

“Philippe, his wife, and their children. They were all gathered together in the Rue de Varenne. The son has stayed behind in Paris by himself.”

“What do you think about them?”

Maigret was obliged to reply:

“I don’t know.”

Philippe, too, strictly speaking, had a motive for killing Saint-Hilaire. He had become the head of the historic V—family which was related to all the courts of Europe.

His father had tolerated Isabelle’s platonic love for the discreet ambassador whom she saw only from a distance and to whom she wrote childish letters.

Once he was dead, the situation was bound to change. In spite of her seventy-two years and her sweetheart’s seventy-seven years, the Princess was going to marry Saint-Hilaire, lose her title, change her name.

Was that a sufficient motive for committing a crime and, as Maigret kept reminding himself, for risking a death-sentence? For replacing, in fact, a mild scandal with a scandal of a much more serious nature.

The chief-inspector muttered in embarrassment:

“I’ve checked his movements on Tuesday evening. He booked in with his family at a hotel in the Place Vendôme, as he was in the habit of doing. When the children had gone to bed, he went out by himself and went up the Champs-Élysées on foot. On the corner of the Rue de Berry he took his pick of the five or six prostitutes who were available and accompanied one of them to her room.”

Maigret had often known murderers, *after* their crime to go and look for a woman, any woman, as if they felt a need for relaxation.

He could not remember a single one acting in this way *before*. Could it have been to produce an alibi?

In that case, the alibi was incomplete, since Philippe de V—had left the prostitute about half past eleven, which had left

him enough time to go to the Rue Saint-Dominique.

“That’s how things stand at the moment. I shall go on looking for a new trail, without much hope of finding one, perhaps another of the former ambassador’s friends nobody has told me about yet. Saint-Hilaire was very regular in his habits, like most old people. Nearly all his friends are dead ... ”

The telephone rang. The clerk got up to answer it.

“Yes ... He’s here ... Would you like to speak to him?”

And turning to the chief-inspector:

“It’s for you ... It seems that it’s very urgent ... ”

“Do you mind?”

“Go ahead.”

“Hullo ... Maigret, yes ... Who’s that speaking?”

He did not recognize the voice because Moers, who finally gave his name, was in a state of great excitement.

“I tried to get you at your office. They told me that ... ”

“Yes, yes.”

“I’m coming to the point. It’s so extraordinary; I’ve just finished the test ... ”

“I know. Well?”

“It’s positive.”

“You’re sure?”

“Absolutely certain. There’s no doubt that Jaquette Larrieu fired one or more shots within the last forty-eight hours.”

“She let you carry out the test?”

“She was no trouble at all.”

“How does she explain it?”

“She doesn’t. I haven’t said anything to her. I had to come back to the laboratory to finish the test.”

“Is Lapointe still with her?”

“He was there when I left the Rue Saint-Dominique.”

“You are certain about what you’ve just told me?”

“Positive.”

“Thank you.”

He hung up, his face serious, a crease in the middle of his forehead, with the magistrate looking at him inquiringly.

“I was wrong,” Maigret murmured regretfully.

“What do you mean?”

“On the off-chance, without taking it seriously, I must admit, I told the laboratory to try the paraffin test on Jaquette’s right hand.”

“And it’s positive? That’s what I thought they were telling you over the telephone, but I found it hard to believe.”

“So did I.”

He ought to have felt a great load off his mind. After an investigation lasting barely twenty-four hours, the problem which had seemed insoluble a few minutes before had now been solved.

Yet the fact was that he felt no sense of satisfaction.

“While I’m here, will you sign a warrant for me,” he sighed.

“You are going to send your men to arrest her?”

“I shall go myself.”

And, hunching his shoulders, Maigret lit his pipe again, while the magistrate silently filled in the blanks of a printed form.

VII



MAIGRET looked into his office on the way in order to pick up his hat. Just as he was going out again, an idea suddenly struck him and, cursing himself for not having thought of it before, he rushed for the telephone.

To save time, he dialled the Rue Saint-Dominique number himself without going through the switchboard. He was anxious to hear Lapointe's voice, to make sure that nothing had happened over there. Instead of the bell he heard the staccato buzz indicating that the line was engaged.

He did not think, and for a few seconds he panicked.

Whom could Lapointe be ringing up? Moers had left him a little earlier. Lapointe knew that he would be getting in touch with the chief-inspector straight away to give him his report.

If the inspector left behind in Saint-Hilaire's flat was using the telephone, it meant that something unexpected had happened and that he was calling Police Headquarters or a doctor.

Maigret tried again, opened the door of the adjoining office and saw Janvier lighting a cigarette.

"Go down and wait for me in the courtyard at the wheel of a car."

He had one last try, only to hear the same buzz in reply.

A little later he could be seen running down the stairs jumping into the little black car and banging the door.

"Rue Saint-Dominique. As fast as you can. Sound the siren."

Janvier, who did not know about the case's latest developments, glanced at him in surprise, for the chief-inspector loathed the siren and rarely used it.

The car sped towards the Pont Saint-Michel and turned right along the embankment, while the other cars drew in to the

curb and the passers-by stopped to follow it with their eyes.

Possibly Maigret's reaction was ridiculous but he could not get rid of the mental picture of Jaquette dead and Lapointe beside her, hanging on to the telephone. It became so real in his mind that he got to the point of wondering how she had committed suicide. She could not have thrown herself out of the window, since the flat was on the ground floor. There was no weapon available, except for the kitchen knives ...

The car stopped. The policeman, at his post by the carriage gateway, out in the sun, was obviously surprised at the siren. The bedroom window was ajar.

Maigret rushed across to the archway, climbed the stone steps, with a Lapointe who was at once calm and astonished.

"What's up, Chief?"

"Where is she?"

"In her room."

"When did you last hear her moving around?"

"Just now."

"Whom were you phoning?"

"I was trying to get through to you."

"What for?"

"She's getting dressed to go out and I wanted to ask you for instructions."

Maigret felt ridiculous in front of Lapointe and Janvier who had joined them. In contrast with the anxiety of the last few minutes, the flat was quieter than ever. The study was still full of sunshine, the door open on to the garden, the linden-tree noisy with birds.

He went into the kitchen, where everything was in order, and heard some slight noises in the old servant's room.

"Can I see you, Mademoiselle Larrieu?"

He had once called her madame and she had protested:

"Mademoiselle, if you please!"

“Who is it?”

“Chief-Inspector Maigret.”

“Just a minute.”

Lapointe went on in a whisper:

“She has had a bath in her employer’s bathroom.”

Maigret had rarely been so displeased with himself and he remembered his dream, the old people who looked at him condescendingly, shaking their heads because he was wearing short trousers and because he was just a little boy in their eyes.

The door of the little room opened, and a whiff of scent reached him, a scent which had been unfashionable for years and which he recognized because his mother had always used it on Sundays to go to High Mass.

It was indeed as if to go to High Mass that old Jaquette was dressed. She was wearing a black silk dress, a black tucker round her neck, a black hat trimmed with white silk, and an immaculate pair of gloves. All that was missing was a missal in one hand.

“I am obliged,” he murmured, “to take you to the Quai des Orfèvres.”

He was prepared to show her the warrant signed by the magistrate but, contrary to his expectations, she showed neither surprise nor indignation. Without a word, she crossed the kitchen, making sure that the gas was turned off, and went into the study to close the French window.

She asked only one question:

“Is anybody going to stay here?”

And as nobody answered her straight away, she added:

“If not, I had better shut the bedroom window.”

Not only, knowing that she had been found out, had she no intention of committing suicide, but she had never been so dignified, so much in control of her feelings. It was she who went out first. Maigret said to Lapointe:

“You had better stay behind.”

She walked in front, giving a little nod of the head to the concierge looking at her through the glass door.

Wouldn't it have been ridiculous, abominable to put handcuffs on this woman who was seventy years old? Maigret invited her to get into the car and took his place beside her.

“You don't need the siren any more.”

The weather was still magnificent and they passed a big red and white coach full of foreign tourists. Maigret could not think of anything to say, any question to ask.

Hundreds of times, he had returned to the Quai des Orfèvres like this, in the company of a suspect, a man or a woman, whom he was going to have to submit to a merciless examination. This could last for hours, and sometimes the interrogation had ended only at daybreak, when the people of Paris were setting out to go to work.

For Maigret, this phase of an investigation was always unpleasant.

Now, for the first time in his life, he was to carry out the operation on an old woman.

In the courtyard of Police Headquarters, he helped her out of the car, but she pushed his hand away and walked with a dignified bearing towards the staircase as if she were crossing the square in front of a church. He had motioned to Janvier to accompany them. All three went up the main staircase and into the chief-inspector's office where the breeze was puffing out the curtains.

“Sit down, please.”

Although he had pointed to an arm-chair, she chose an upright chair, while Janvier, who was familiar with the routine, settled down at one end of the desk and took a note-book and pencil.

Maigret cleared his throat, filled a pipe, walked over to the window, and came back to plant himself in front of the old

woman who was watching him with her bright, motionless little eyes.

“First of all I have to inform you that the examining magistrate has just signed a warrant for your arrest.”

He showed it to her. She granted it only a polite interest.

“You are charged with having committed the wilful murder of your employer, the Comte Armand de Saint-Hilaire, during the night of Tuesday to Wednesday last. A technician from the Criminal Records Office carried out the paraffin test on your right hand a little while ago. This test consists of collecting the particles of powder and chemical substances which are engrained in a person’s skin when that person makes use of a firearm, particularly an automatic pistol.”

He watched her, hoping for some reaction, but it was she who seemed to be studying him, it was she who was the calmer and more self-possessed of the two.

“You don’t say anything?”

“I have nothing to say.”

“The test was positive, which means that it established, beyond any possible doubt, that you used a firearm recently.”

Impassive as she was, she might just as well have been in church listening to a sermon.

“What have you done with that weapon? I suppose on Wednesday morning, on your way to the Quai d’Orsay, you threw it into the Seine with the cartridge-cases? I warn you that the necessary steps will be taken to recover the pistol, that divers will go down to the river bed.”

She had decided to keep quiet and keep quiet she did. As for her eyes, they remained so serene that one might have thought that she was not involved in what was going on, that she was there by accident, listening to a conversation which had nothing to do with her.

“I don’t know what your motive was, although I can guess. You had lived for nearly fifty years with the Comte de Saint-

Hilaire. You had been as intimate with him as two human beings can be.”

An ephemeral smile hovered over Jaquette’s lips, a smile in which there was mingled both coquetry and a secret satisfaction.

“You knew that after the Prince’s death your employer would put the dream of his youth into effect.”

It was annoying to talk to no purpose, and now and then Maigret had to keep a firm grip on himself to refrain from shaking the old woman by the shoulders.

“If he hadn’t been killed he would have got married, isn’t that so? Would you have kept your position in the household? And if you had, would that position have been quite the same?”

With his pencil poised in mid-air, Janvier was still waiting for a reply for him to record.

“On Tuesday evening, you went into your employer’s study. He was correcting the proofs of his book. Did you have a quarrel with him?”

After another ten minutes of questions without a single reply, Maigret, utterly exasperated, felt the need to go and relax for a moment in the inspectors’ room. That reminded him that Lapointe had been in the Rue Saint-Dominique since the previous evening.

“Are you busy, Lucas?”

“Nothing urgent.”

“In that case, go and take over from Lapointe.”

Then, as it was after midday, he added:

“Drop into the Brasserie Dauphine on the way. Tell them to send up a plate of sandwiches and some beer and coffee for us.”

And, thinking of the old woman:

“A bottle of mineral water too.”

In his office, he found Jaquette and Janvier sitting motionless on their chairs as if they were in a picture.

For half an hour he walked up and down the room, puffing at his pipe, stopping in front of the window, and planting himself a few feet from the servant to look her in the face.

It was not an interrogation, for she remained stubbornly silent, but a long, more or less disconnected monologue.

“It’s possible—I’m telling you this straight away—that the experts will find that this is a case of diminished responsibility. Your lawyer will certainly argue that it was a crime of passion ... ”

It seemed ridiculous, but it was true.

“Remaining silent won’t help you at all. Whereas if you plead guilty you have every chance of moving the jury. Why not start now?”

Children play a game of this sort: you must not open your mouth whatever your partner may say or do, and above all you must not laugh.

Jaquette neither spoke nor laughed. She followed Maigret with her eyes as he came and went, behaving all the time as if she were not involved, showing no emotion, no reaction of any sort.

“The Count was the only man in your life.”

What was the use? He searched in vain for her Achilles’ heel. There was a knock at the door. It was the waiter from the Brasserie Dauphine, who put the tray down on the chief-inspector’s desk.

“You had better eat something. At the rate we are going now, we shall probably be a long time yet.”

He offered her a ham sandwich. The waiter had gone. She picked up a corner of the crumby bread and, for a wonder, opened her mouth.

“I haven’t eaten any meat for fifteen years. Old people don’t need it.”

“Would you prefer cheese?”

“In any case, I’m not hungry.”

He went into the inspectors’ room again.

“Somebody ring up the brasserie and tell them to send over some cheese sandwiches.”

He for his part ate as he walked up and down, as if out of revenge, with his pipe in one hand and the sandwich in the other, and now and then he stopped to have a drink of beer. Janvier had put down his useless pencil to have something to eat too.

“Would you prefer to talk to me alone?”

This evoked nothing but a shrug of her shoulders.

“You are entitled as from now to the services of any lawyer you choose. I’m prepared to send for the one you indicate straight away. Do you know a lawyer?”

“No.”

“Do you want me to give you the list of lawyers?”

“It isn’t any use.”

Would you prefer me to choose one for you?”

“There isn’t any point.”

They had made some progress, since she was at least talking.

“You admit that you shot your employer?”

“I have nothing to say.”

“In other words, you’ve sworn to keep quiet, whatever happens?”

Once again there was the same exasperating silence. Pipe smoke was floating about the office, into which the sunlight was falling at an angle. The atmosphere began to smell of ham, beer, coffee.

“Would you like a cup of coffee?”

“I only drink coffee in the morning, with a lot of milk.”

“What would you like to drink?”

“Nothing.”

“Are you planning to go on a hunger strike?”

It had been a mistake to say that, because she suppressed a smile at the idea, which might possibly appeal to her.

He had seen suspects of all sorts here, in similar circumstances, both tough characters and weak characters, some who cried, others who grew paler and paler, and yet others who defied him and laughed at him.

It was the first time that anybody, sitting on that chair, had shown so much indifference and calm obstinacy.

“You still don’t want to say anything?”

“Not now.”

“When are you thinking of talking?”

“I don’t know.”

“Are you waiting for something?”

Silence.

“Would you like me to ring up the Princesse de V— ?”

She shook her head.

“Is there anybody to whom you want to send a message, or anybody you would like to see?”

The cheese sandwiches were brought in and she looked at them apathetically. She shook her head and said again:

“Not now.”

“So you’re determined not to say anything, drink anything or eat anything.”

It was a hard chair, and nearly all those who had sat on it had soon begun to feel uncomfortable. At the end of an hour, she was still holding herself as erect as ever, without moving her feet or her arms, and without having changed her position.

“Listen, Jaquette ... ”

She frowned, shocked at this familiarity, and it was the chief-inspector who showed some embarrassment.

“I warn you that we shall stay in this room as long as is necessary. We have material evidence that you have fired one or more shots. All I am asking you to do is to tell me why and in what circumstances. By your stupid silence ... ”

He had used the word unintentionally and he corrected himself.

“By your silence you are running the risk of putting the police on the wrong track and casting suspicion on other people. If, half an hour from now, you haven’t answered my questions, I shall ask the Princess to come here and I shall put her in your presence. I shall summon her son too, Alain Mazon, and Mazon’s wife, and we shall see whether that general confrontation ... ”

He called out angrily:

“What is it?”

There was a knock at the door. Old Joseph beckoned him into the corridor and, with his head bent forward, whispered:

“There’s a young man who insists ... ”

“What young man?”

Joseph held out a visiting-card bearing the name of Julien de V—, Isabelle’s grandson.

“Where is he?”

“In the waiting-room. He says that he’s in a hurry because there’s an important lecture he mustn’t miss.”

“Ask him to wait a moment.”

He went back into the office.

“Isabelle’s grandson, Julien, is asking to see me. Do you still insist on remaining silent?”

It was admittedly exasperating, but it was pathetic too. Maigret thought that he could see signs of a conflict taking place in the old woman, and he felt unwilling to hustle her.

Even Janvier, who was just a spectator, looked a little conscience-stricken.

“You’ll have to talk sooner or later. In that case why ... ”

“Am I entitled to see a priest?”

“You want to make a confession?”

I’m just asking for permission to talk to a priest for a few minutes. The Abbé Barraud?”

“Where can I get hold of the Abbé Barraud?”

“At the Sainte-Clotilde presbytery.”

“He’s your confessor, is he?”

He did not want to miss the slightest chance, and he picked up the telephone.

“Get me the Sainte-Clotilde presbytery ... Yes ... I’ll hold the line ... The Abbé Barraud ... It doesn’t matter how you spell it ... ”

He moved the pipes about on his desk, arranging them in Indian file like soldiers.

“Hullo ... The Abbé Barraud? ... This is Police Headquarters ... Maigret, divisional chief-inspector ... I have one of your parishioners in my office who would like to talk to you ... Yes ... It’s Mademoiselle Larrieu ... Can you take a taxi and come round to the Quai des Orfèvres? ... Thank you ... Yes ... She’ll wait here for you ... ”

And to Janvier:

“When the priest arrives show him in here and leave them together ... There’s somebody I’ve got to see in the meantime ... ”

He made for the glass-sided waiting-room where the only person was the young man in black whom he had glimpsed the day before in the Rue de Varenne in the company of his parents and his brothers and sisters. When he saw Maigret, he stood up and followed the chief-inspector into a little office which was unoccupied.

“Sit down.”

“I haven’t got long. I have to go back to the Rue d’Ulm, where I’ve got a lecture in half an hour.”

In the tiny office, he seemed taller and lankier than before. The expression on his face was serious and rather sad.

“Yesterday, when you came to see my grandmother, I nearly spoke to you.”

Why did Maigret feel that he would have liked to have a son like this boy? He had a natural ease of manner at the same time as a sort of innate modesty, and if he was a little withdrawn, one could tell that it was out of tact.

“I don’t know whether what I’m going to tell you will be of any use to you. I thought about it a lot last night. On Tuesday afternoon, I went to see my uncle.”

“Your uncle?”

The young man blushed, a slight blush which disappeared straight away and which he replaced with a shy smile.

“That’s what I called the Comte de Saint-Hilaire.”

“You used to go and see him?”

“Yes. I didn’t talk about it to my parents, but I didn’t try to conceal it from them either. I first heard about him when I was a boy.”

“From whom?”

“From my governesses, then, later on, from my school-mates. My grandmother’s love-story is almost legendary.”

“I know.”

“When I was about ten or eleven, I asked her about him, and the two of us got into the habit of talking about Saint-Hilaire. She used to read me certain letters, those, for instance, in which he described diplomatic receptions or gave an account of his conversations with heads of state. Have you read his letters?”

“No.”

“He wrote very well, in a lively style, rather like Cardinal de Retz. It may have been on account of the Count and his stories that I chose the diplomatic career.”

“When did you get to know him personally?”

“Two years ago. I had a friend at Stanislas whose grandfather had also been in the Service. One day, at his home, I met the Comte de Saint-Hilaire and asked to be introduced to him. I thought I could sense his emotion as he looked me up and down, and I was rather moved too. He asked me some questions about my studies and my plans for the future.”

“You went to see him in the Rue Saint-Dominique?”

“He had invited me there, though he had added: ‘Provided that your parents have no objection.’ ”

“Did you meet him often?”

“No. About once a month. It all depended. For instance, I asked his advice after my baccalaureate, and he encouraged me in my decision to go through the Ecole Normale. He considered, as I did, that even if it didn’t help me in my career, it would still provide me with a solid basis.

“One day, without thinking, I said:

“ ‘I feel rather as if I were talking to an uncle.’

“ ‘And I to a nephew,’ he replied. ‘Why don’t you call me uncle?’

“That’s why I used the word just now.”

“You didn’t like your grandfather?”

“I didn’t know him very well. For all that they belonged to the same generation, he and the Comte de Saint-Hilaire were two very different men. My grandfather, for me, remained somebody impressive and inaccessible.”

“And your grandmother?”

“We were great friends. We still are.”

“She knew about your visits to the Rue Saint-Dominique?”

“Yes. I used to tell her all about our conversations. She would ask me for details, and sometimes it was she who reminded me that I hadn’t been to see our friend for a long time.”

Although he was drawn to the young man, Maigret nonetheless studied him with an astonishment bordering on mistrust. They were not accustomed, at the Quai des Orfèvres, to meeting young men of this kind, and once again he had an impression of an unreal world, of people who came, not out of life, but out of a book of moral uplift.

“So on Tuesday afternoon you went to the Rue Saint-Dominique.”

“Yes.”

“Had you any special reason for this call?”

“In a way. My grandfather had died two days before. I thought that my grandmother would like to know how her friend was reacting.”

“You didn’t feel the same curiosity?”

“Perhaps I did. I knew that they had sworn to marry one day if it were possible.”

“The idea appealed to you?”

“It did rather.”

“And to your parents?”

“I never talked about it to my father, but I’ve every reason to think that he didn’t mind the idea. As for my mother ... ?”

Since he did not finish his sentence, Maigret prompted him:

“Your mother ... ?”

“I’m not being unkind about her if I say that she attaches greater importance to titles and privileges than anybody else in the family.”

Probably because she had not been born a princess but simply Irène de Marchangy.

“What happened in the course of this conversation in the Rue Saint-Dominique?”

“Nothing that I can explain at all clearly. All the same, I thought I ought to tell you about it. Right from the beginning, the Comte de Saint-Hilaire seemed worried and it was suddenly borne in on me that he was very old. Before then, he had never looked his age. You could tell that he was in love with life, that he enjoyed every aspect of it, every moment of it, as a connoisseur. To my mind he was a man of the eighteenth century who had strayed into the twentieth. You understand what I mean?”

Maigret nodded.

“I didn’t expect to find him broken up by the death of my grandfather, who was two years older than he was, especially seeing that that death had been accidental and hadn’t really been very painful. But on Tuesday afternoon Saint-Hilaire was out of spirits and avoided looking at me as if he had something to hide.

“I said something like this:

“ ‘A year from now, you’ll finally be able to marry my grandmother ... ’

“He turned his head away, so I pressed the point:

“ ‘How do you feel about it?’

“I wish I could remember his exact words. It’s strange that I can’t remember them, seeing that I was so struck by their meaning and all that they implied.

What he said, in substance, was:

“ ‘I won’t be allowed to.’

“And when I looked at his face, I thought I could see fear in it.

“As you can see, it’s all pretty vague. At the time I didn’t attach much importance to it, imagining that it was the natural reaction of an old man hearing about the death of another old man and telling himself that it would be his turn soon.

“When I heard that he had been murdered, that scene came back to me.”

“Did you mention it to anybody?”

“No.”

“Not even to your grandmother?”

“I didn’t want to bother her. I could swear that the Count felt that he was in danger. He wasn’t a man to imagine things. In spite of his age, his mind was still exceptionally clear and his philosophy of life kept him proof against baseless fears.”

“If I understood you correctly, you think he foresaw what has happened to him.”

“He foresaw something unpleasant, yes. I decided to tell you about it because, ever since yesterday, it has been worrying me.”

“He never talked to you about his friends?”

“About his dead friends. He hadn’t any friends left who were still alive, but that didn’t upset him too much.

“ ‘When you come to think of it,’ he used to say, ‘it isn’t as unpleasant as all that to be the last to go.’ ”

“And he added sadly:

“ ‘It means there’s still one memory in which the others can go on living.’ ”

“He didn’t talk to you about his enemies?”

“I’m convinced that he never had any. A few envious colleagues, perhaps, at the beginning of his career, which was swift and brilliant. They too are dead and buried.”

“Thank you. You did right to come.”

“You still don’t know anything?”

Maigret hesitated, and nearly mentioned Jaquette who, at that very moment, would be shut up in his office with the Abbé Barraud.

At Police Headquarters, they sometimes called the chief-inspector’s office the confessional, but this was the first time

that it had really served as one.

“Nothing certain, no.”

“I must be getting back to the Rue d’Ulm.”

Maigret accompanied him to the head of the stairs.

“Thank you again.”

He walked along the huge corridor for a while, with his hands behind his back, lit his pipe, and went into the inspectors’ room.

“Is the Abbé next door?”

“He’s been there quite a while.”

“What’s he like?”

And Janvier replied with a somewhat bitter irony:

“He’s the oldest of the lot.”

VIII



GET me Lucas on the phone.”

“Rue Saint-Dominique?”

“Yes. I sent him to relieve Lapointe.”

He was beginning to lose patience. The conversation was going on in an undertone in the adjoining office, and when he went up to the door, all he could hear was the sort of whispering one heard outside a real confessional.

“Lucas? ... All quiet over there? ... Nothing but phone calls from journalists? ... Go on telling them there’s nothing new ...

“What? ... No, she hasn’t talked yet ... Yes, she’s in my office, but not with me or anybody else from Headquarters ... She’s with a priest ... ”

The next minute, the examining magistrate was on the line, and Maigret repeated roughly the same words.

“No, don’t worry, I’m not hustling her. On the contrary ... ”

He could not remember being so gentle and patient in the whole of his life. Once again the English article Pardon had read him came back to him and evoked an ironic smile.

The contributor to the *Lancet* had been wrong. It wasn’t a schoolmaster in the end, nor a novelist, nor even a detective, who was going to solve the problem of Jaquette, but an octogenarian priest.

“How long have they been in there?”

“Twenty-five minutes.”

He hadn’t even the consolation of having a glass of beer, for the tray had been left next door. By the time he got to it, the beer would be warm. It was warm already. He was tempted to go down to the Brasserie Dauphine, but hesitated to leave just then.

He felt that the solution was within reach, and tried to guess what it was, not so much in his capacity as a chief-inspector of the Judicial Police whose duty it was to identify a criminal and get a confession out of him, as in his capacity as a human being.

For it was as a human being that he had conducted this case, as if it had been a personal matter, so much so that in spite of himself, he had brought childhood memories into it.

Wasn’t he involved to some extent? If Saint-Hilaire had been an ambassador for several decades, if his platonic love for Isabelle dated back nearly fifty years, he, Maigret, had twenty-five years’ service at Police Headquarters to his credit, and as recently as the previous day he had felt convinced that every conceivable variety of individual had passed before him.

He didn’t regard himself as a superman; he didn’t consider himself infallible. On the contrary, it was with a certain humility that he began all his investigations, even the simplest.

He distrusted the evidence, suspected hasty judgments. He patiently tried to understand, never forgetting that the most obvious motives are not always the most important.

If he hadn't a very high opinion of men and their capabilities, he went on believing in man himself.

He looked for his weak points. And when, in the end, he put his finger on them, he didn't crow with joy, but on the contrary felt a certain sadness.

Since the previous day, he had felt out of his depth, for he had found himself unexpectedly faced with people whose very existence he had never suspected. All their attitudes, their remarks, their reactions were unfamiliar to him, and he tried in vain to classify them.

He wanted to like them, even Jaquette, for all that she got his back up.

He discovered, in their way of life, a grace, a harmony, a certain innocence too which appealed to him.

Suddenly, he coldly reminded himself:

"Saint-Hilaire has been killed for all that."

By one of these people, that was practically certain. By Jaquette, if scientific tests still meant anything.

For a few moments, he felt an intense dislike for them all, including the dead man, and including that young man who had just aroused in him more keenly than ever before the longing for fatherhood.

Why shouldn't these people have been like others? Why shouldn't they have known the same sordid interests and the same passions?

This all too innocent love-story suddenly annoyed him. He stopped believing in it, and started looking for something else, a different explanation, more consistent with his experience.

Don't two women who have loved the same man for so many years inevitably end up by hating each other?

Wouldn't a family allied to most of the royal families of Europe react strongly to the threat of a marriage as ridiculous as that envisaged by the two old people?

None of them made any accusations. None of them had any enemies. All of them lived in apparent harmony, except Mazon and his wife who had finally separated.

Irritated by the whispering which was still going on, Maigret nearly flung the door open, and possibly what restrained him was the reproachful glance which Janvier shot at him.

He too had been won over!

“I hope you’ve got somebody watching the corridor?”

He had got to the point of envisaging the possibility of the old priest’s vanishing with his penitent.

All the same, he felt sure that he was on the verge of discovering the truth which had eluded him so far. It was all very simple, he knew that. Human dramas are always simple when you consider them afterwards.

Several times since the previous day, and especially since that morning, though he couldn’t have said exactly when, he had been on the point of understanding.

A discreet knocking on the communicating door made him jump.

“Shall I come with you?” asked Janvier.

“It would be a good idea if you did.”

The Abbé Barraud, who was indeed a very old man, was standing up, a skeletal figure with long, untidy hair forming a halo round his head. His cassock was shiny with wear, and it was badly darned here and there.

Jaquette did not seem to have left her chair, on which she was sitting as erect as ever. Only the expression on her face had changed. She was no longer tense, no longer in a fighting mood. She no longer showed any sign of defiance, of a fierce determination to remain silent.

If she was not smiling, she was none the less full of serenity.

“I must apologize, Chief-Inspector, for keeping you waiting such a long time. You see, the question Mademoiselle Larrieu

asked me was rather delicate and I had to consider it carefully before giving her a reply. I must admit that I nearly asked you for permission to telephone the Archbishop to ask his opinion.”

Janvier, sitting at the end of the table, was taking down the conversation in shorthand. Maigret, as if he felt the need to keep himself in countenance, had installed himself at his desk.

“Sit down, Monsieur l’Abbé.”

“I may stay?”

“I imagine your penitent still has need of your services.”

The priest sat down on a chair, took a little wooden box out of his cassock, and took a pinch of snuff. This gesture, and the grains of snuff on the greyish cassock, brought back old memories to Maigret.

“Mademoiselle Larrieu, as you are aware, is extremely devout, and it is her piety which has led her to adopt an attitude which I have felt it my duty to persuade her to abandon. What was worrying her was the thought that the Comte de Saint-Hilaire might not be given Christian burial, and that is why she had decided to wait until the funeral had taken place before saying anything.”

For Maigret, it was like a child’s balloon suddenly bursting in the sunshine, and he blushed at having been so close to the truth without managing to guess it.

“The Comte de Saint-Hilaire committed suicide?”

“I am afraid that that is the truth of the matter. But as I told Mademoiselle Larrieu, we have no proof that he didn’t repent what he had done at the last moment. No death is instantaneous in the eyes of the Church. Infinity exists in time as well as in space, and an infinitely small lapse of time, though it may defy measurement by doctors, is sufficient for contrition.

“I don’t believe that the Church will refuse its last blessing to the Comte de Saint-Hilaire.”

For the first time, Jaquette's eyes became misty, and she took a handkerchief out of her bag to wipe them, while her lips formed a girlish pout.

"Speak up, Jaquette," said the priest encouragingly. "Repeat what you have just told me."

She swallowed her saliva.

"I was in bed. I was asleep. I heard an explosion and I rushed into the study."

"You found your master sprawled on the carpet with half his face shot away."

"Yes."

"Where was the pistol?"

"On the desk."

"What did you do?"

"I went to get a mirror from my room to make sure that he had stopped breathing."

"You made certain that he was dead. After that?"

"My first impulse was to telephone the Princess."

"Why didn't you?"

"First of all because it was nearly midnight."

"You weren't afraid that she would disapprove of your plan?"

"I didn't think of it straight away. I told myself that the police were going to come and suddenly I realized that because it was suicide the Count wouldn't be given Christian burial."

"How long was it from the moment when you knew your employer was dead to the moment when you in your turn fired the gun?"

"I don't know. Ten minutes perhaps? I knelt down beside him and I said a prayer. Then, standing up, I took hold of the pistol and I fired, without looking, and asking the dead man and Heaven to forgive me."

“You fired three bullets?”

“I don’t know. I pulled the trigger until it didn’t work any more. Then I noticed some bright dots on the carpet. I don’t know anything about guns. I realized that they were cartridge-cases and I picked them up. I didn’t sleep a wink all night. Early next morning I went and threw the gun and the cartridge-cases into the Seine, from the Pont de la Concorde. I had to wait quite a while, because there was a policeman on duty in front of the Chamber of Deputies who seemed to be looking at me.”

“Do you know why your employer committed suicide?”

She glanced at the priest, who gave her an encouraging nod.

“For some time he had been worried and upset.”

Why?”

“A few months ago, the doctor advised him to give up drinking wine and spirits. He was a great wine-lover. He gave it up for a few days, then he started drinking it again. That gave him stomach-ache and he had to get up in the night to take some bicarbonate of soda. In the end I was buying him a packet every week.”

“What’s the name of his doctor?”

“Doctor Ourgaud.”

Maigret picked up the receiver.

“Get me Doctor Ourgaud please.”

And, to Jaquette:

“He had been his doctor for a long time?”

“You might almost say he had always been his doctor.”

“How old is Doctor Ourgaud?”

“I don’t know exactly. About my age.”

“And he is still in practice?”

“He goes on seeing his old patients. His son has set up just across the landing from him, on the Boulevard Saint-Germain.”

Right to the very end, they remained not only in the same district but among people who might be said to belong to the same species.

“Hullo. Doctor Ourgaud? This is Chief-Inspector Maigret.”

The doctor asked him to speak louder and closer to the receiver, apologizing for being rather hard of hearing.

“As you may have guessed, I should like to ask you a few questions about one of your patients. Yes, it’s him I’m talking about. Jaquette Larrieu is here in my office and has just told me that the Comte de Saint-Hilaire committed suicide.— What’s that? ... You were expecting me to come and see you? ... You had guessed it was that? ... Hullo. I’m speaking as close to the receiver as I can ... She says that for several months, the Comte de Saint-Hilaire had been suffering from stomach-ache ... I can hear you perfectly ... Doctor Tudelle, the medical expert who carried out the post-mortem, says that he was surprised to find an old man’s organs in such good condition ...

“What’s that? ... That’s what you kept telling your patient? ... He didn’t believe you? ...

“Yes ... Yes ... I see ... You couldn’t manage to convince him ... He went to see your colleagues ...

“Thank you, Doctor ... I shall probably have to trouble you to take your evidence ... But no! On the contrary, it’s very important ... ”

He hung up. His face was serious and Janvier thought he could distinguish a certain emotion in it.

“The Comte de Saint-Hilaire,” he explained in a rather dull voice, “had got it into his head that he was suffering from cancer. In spite of his doctor’s assurance to the contrary, he started going to different doctors to be examined, deciding every time that the truth was being kept from him.”

Jaquette murmured:

“He had always been so proud of his health! In the old days he often used to say to me that he wasn’t afraid of death, that he was prepared for it, but that he would find it hard to put up

with being ill. When he had the flu, for instance, he used to hide like a sick animal and tried to keep me out of his bedroom as much as possible. He was very touchy about it. One of his friends, several years ago, died of a cancer which kept him in bed for nearly two years. He was given various complicated treatments and the Count used to say impatiently: 'Why don't they let him die? If I were in his place, I should ask them to help me to go on as soon as possible.' ”

Isabelle's grandson, Julien, could not remember the exact words Saint-Hilaire had used a few hours before he died. Thinking he would find him happy to see his dream close to fulfilment, he had found himself in the presence of an anxious, worried old man, who seemed to be afraid of something.

At least, that was what the young man had thought. Because he was not yet an old man. Jaquette, for her part, had understood straight away. And Maigret, who was more than half-way along the road, closer to the old people than to the students of the Rue d'Ulm, understood too: Saint-Hilaire expected to be bed-ridden before very long.

And that just as an old love, which nothing had dimmed in fifty years, was on the point of entering real life.

Isabelle, who saw him only from a distance and who had kept ever-present the picture of their youth, would become a sick-nurse at the same time as she became his wife, and she would know only the infirmities of a worn-out body.

“Excuse me,” he said suddenly, going towards the door.

He made his way along the corridors of the Palais de Justice, went up to the third floor, and spent half an hour closeted with the examining magistrate.

When he came back to his office, the three people were still in the same place and Janvier was chewing his pencil.

“You are free to go,” he told Jaquette. “A car will take you home. Or rather, I think I ought to have you taken to Maître Aubonnet's, where you have an appointment. As for you, Monsieur l'Abbé, you will be dropped at the presbytery. In the

next few days, there will be some formalities to be completed, some documents to be signed.”

And, turning to Janvier:

“Will you take the wheel?”

He spent an hour with the Director of Police Headquarters, and afterwards he was seen in the Brasserie Dauphine, where he drank two big glasses of beer at the bar.

Madame Maigret was expecting him to ring up to tell her that he would not be coming home for dinner, as often happened in the course of an investigation.

She was surprised, at half past six, to hear him coming up the stairs, and she opened the door at the very moment that he reached the landing.

He was more serious than usual, serious and serene, but she did not dare to ask him any questions when, as he kissed her, he pressed her against him for a long time without saying anything.

She could not know that he had just been immersed in a distant past and a rather less distant future.

“What’s for dinner?” he finally asked, looking as if he were pulling himself together.

Noland

June 21, 1960

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[scanned anonymously in a galaxy far far away]

[for a complete bibliography of all 103 episodes of *The Maigret Saga*, check out [Steve Trussel’s amazing fan site](#)]

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